

Unfinished Business:

WOMEN RUNNING IN 2018 AND BEYOND

A Report from the Center for American Women and Politics



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The Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University—New Brunswick studies how American politics and government work and change, analyzes how the democracy might improve, and promotes political participation and civic engagement. The Institute explores state and national politics through research, education, and public service, linking the study of politics with its day-to-day practice. To learn more about Eagleton programs and expertise, visit eagleton.rutgers.edu.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender disparities in American politics were not upended in a single cycle, but the 2018 election marked sites of progress as well as persistent hurdles for women candidates. Evaluating the 2018 election in the context of both past and present offers key insights into the gendered terrain that candidates will navigate in 2020 and beyond.

Women candidates in election 2018 disrupted the (White male) status quo in American politics and challenged assumptions of how, where, and which women can achieve electoral success.

- Women ran for and were elected to office in record numbers in the 2018 election, in addition to achieving historic milestones for women's political representation.
- Women were winners in 2018, outperforming men among non-incumbents at nearly every level in both primary and general elections. Women candidates won the majority of U.S. House seats that flipped from Republican to Democrat in election 2018.
- More than one-third of women of color elected to the U.S. House for the first time in 2018 won in majority-White districts.
- Women running in 2018, especially Democratic women, embraced gender as an electoral asset instead of a hurdle to overcome en route to Election Day. They drew upon distinctly gendered experiences and challenged both the valuation and expression of stereotypically masculine credentials for officeholding.
- Women challenged gender and intersectional biases while campaigning, proving their power in disrupting instead of adapting to the prevailing rules of the game.
- Many women candidates refused to wait to run for office in 2018, challenging party norms as well as historical hurdles confronting young women and mothers of young children.
- The rise in the number of women donors and their concentration of support for Democratic women candidates created more equitable financial conditions between women and men in 2018.
- While sexism in the electorate contributed to President Trump's success in 2016, research indicates that some Republican candidates paid a penalty for perceived sexism in 2018.
- In 2018 and 2020, greater scrutiny of and public backlash to gender and/or intersectional media bias reflects some progress in creating a media landscape where bias – even if it persists – does not go unanswered.

But the 2018 election did not upend durable gender and intersectional disparities in electoral politics and officeholding.

- Women were still underrepresented among all candidates in 2018 and remain less than one-third of elected officials in 2019.
- The gains for women in election 2018 were concentrated among Democratic women; at every level of

office, the number of Republican women officeholders declined.

- Celebrating “firsts” for women, and especially women of color, across levels of office serves as a reminder of the work left to do to create political institutions that reflect the full range of constituencies they serve.
- The party and financial support infrastructures for women vary for Democrats and Republicans, as well as between White women and women of color.
- Gender parity in outcomes – whether in fundraising or at the ballot box – can mask differences in the amount and type of work women candidates must do to achieve the same results as White men.
- Gender and intersectional biases persist in evaluations of women and women of color candidates.
- Women continue to face harassment and threats of violence, including threats of a sexual nature, as a cost of candidacy.
- Gender biases persist in media coverage and commentary of U.S. campaigns, and mainstream coverage and commentary on political campaigns remain dominated by White men.

Early signs from the 2020 cycle indicate that women will continue to disrupt U.S. electoral politics.

- Many women candidates who lost in 2018 are running again in 2020, and others are refusing to “wait their turn” to run. These decisions reflect some lasting and positive effects of expanding the pool of women candidates in 2018.
- Achieving gender parity among candidates and officeholders will be unlikely without Republican women. The Republican Party’s reaction to women’s losses in 2018 and recruitment efforts in 2020 will serve as one indicator of whether the party serves as a gateway or gatekeeper to Republican women’s candidacy and officeholding.
- An historic number of women are running for president in 2020, capitalizing on the success of women in 2018 and continuing to confront and challenge electoral norms and institutions that have advantaged White men.
- Men have had to navigate shifting gendered terrain in recent elections, with White male candidates – perhaps for the first time – being asked to address their privilege as a potential liability for their presidential bids instead of assuming that their race and gender identities provide only electoral advantages. Their experiences serve as a reminder that men play a central role, especially as they continue to outnumber women as candidates for office, in reinforcing or rejecting the status quo in American elections.

The story of gender in election 2018, as well as what it tells us about the future for women candidates and their success, is more complex than simply celebrating a “surge” in women running and winning in one election. This report draws from research conducted before, about, and after the 2018 election to tell a more comprehensive story with important lessons for 2020 and beyond.

BY THE NUMBERS

Women made history in the 2018 election, but the story of women's political success is more complex than the records broken. This report analyzes women's success in 2018, both by and beyond the numbers. In this section, we detail the numeric gains (and lack thereof) for women, with particular attention to differences with men, between parties, and among women of different racial and ethnic groups. The numbers show historic successes for women in election 2018, but also reveal the limits of that success for particular groups of women and for women at different levels of elected office. They also demonstrate that work toward gender parity in political leadership remains unfinished as we approach the 2020 election.

Women broke records, but have not achieved parity with men in electoral politics.

- A record number of women ran for congressional and gubernatorial posts in 2018, but women remained less than 25% of candidates on primary ballots across these levels.
- Despite a record number of women nominated for congressional, gubernatorial, statewide elected executive, and state legislative offices in 2019, women remained less than one-third of candidates on general election ballots across these levels.
- A record number of women serve in Congress and in state legislatures in 2019, and women of color serve in record numbers in Congress, in statewide elected executive offices, and in state legislatures nationwide. However, while women are over 50% of the population, they remain less than one-third of elected officials at and above the state legislative level.
- Three states elected their first woman governors in 2018 (ME, SD, and IA), but 20 states have still never had a woman governor as of 2019.

Women of color made historic gains, but they are still achieving firsts that reveal the persistence of past and present underrepresentation.

- The first Democratic woman of color governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM), was elected in 2018, and four states (CT, KS, MA, MN) elected their first women of color to Congress in 2018.
- As a result of the 2018 election, the 116th Congress is the first to include Native American women and Muslim women.

Women were winners in 2018, outperforming men among non-incumbents at nearly every level in both primary and general elections.

- Non-incumbent women candidates for the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and statewide elected executive offices (other than governor) won primary elections at higher rates than non-incumbent men overall and in both major parties.
- Non-incumbent women overall and among Democrats won general election contests at higher rates than men for the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, governor, and other statewide elected executive offices, but non-incum-

bent Republican women outperformed their male counterparts only in general election contests for governor and other statewide elected executive offices.

- Women candidates won the majority of U.S. House seats that flipped from Republican to Democrat in election 2018, thereby playing a key role in changing partisan control of the chamber in 2019. Women also flipped 4 of 7 governorships from Republican to Democrat.

Women's electoral success was concentrated in the Democratic Party.

- The gains for women in election 2018 were concentrated among Democratic women at every level of office; the number of Republican women declined in the U.S. House, among governors and statewide elected executive officials, and in state legislatures nationwide from 2018 to 2019.

In addition to the data presented here, see the full bank of data visualizations included and complementary to this report at www.womenrun.rutgers.edu.

CONGRESS

A record number of women filed for, won nomination, and were elected to the U.S. House and Senate in 2018.¹ Moreover, the number of female candidates who filed for the U.S. House from 2016 to 2018 increased by 74%, while the number of male candidates increased by less than 20%.²

But the story of women's "surge" and success belonged to the Democratic Party. While a record number of Democratic women filed as candidates for the U.S. House and Senate, the number of Republican women candidates for the U.S. House fell short of the previous high. Moreover, the number of Democratic women who filed to run for the House doubled from 2016 to 2018, while the number of Republican women House candidates increased by about 26%.

Across parties, women still fell short of parity with men as congressional candidates, nominees, and winners in 2018. Women were less than 25% of candidates who filed to run for the U.S. House or Senate in 2018, and fewer than one-third of all nominees. Women were 23.5% of House winners and 40% of Senate winners in fall 2018.³ Republican women made up a smaller proportion of their party's candidates, nominees, and winners for the U.S. House and Senate than did Democratic women in 2018, with partisan disparities greatest among winners.

The freshman class of women in the House of Representatives in the 116th Congress (2019-2021) is the largest ever, with 36 (35D, 1R) non-incumbent women elected. The previous high was 24, set in 1992. This outcome is due to the particular success of non-incumbent Democratic women House candidates. Of the 39 House seats that Democrats flipped from Republican to Democrat in the 2018

¹ Throughout this report, filed candidates refer to candidates who filed and appeared on primary ballots. Candidates who withdrew before any votes were cast and who did not appear on primary ballots are not included.

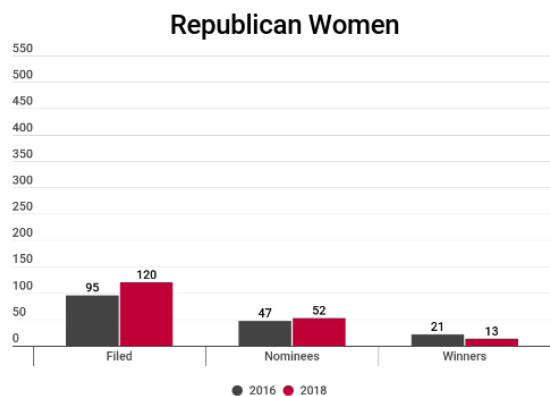
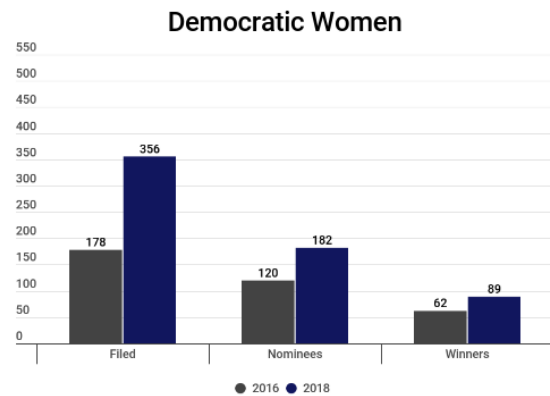
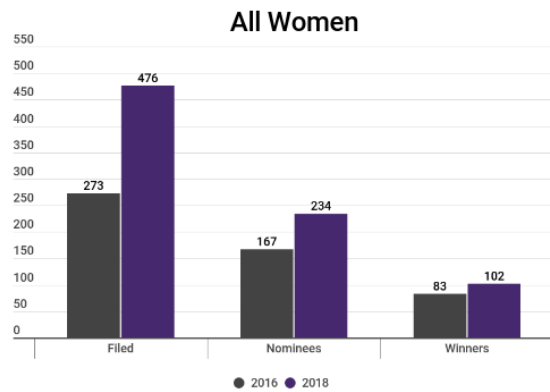
² Candidates for non-voting delegate positions are not included in these analyses.

³ This does not include Martha McSally (R-AZ), who was appointed to the U.S. Senate in 2019.

⁴ Pennsylvania districts were excluded from this count because district lines were redrawn for the 2018 election.

WOMEN CANDIDATES FOR THE US HOUSE

2016-2018

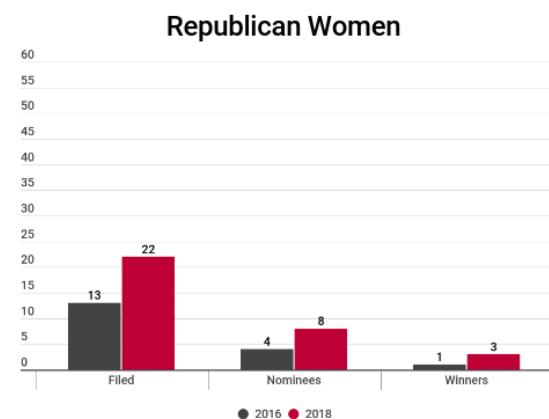
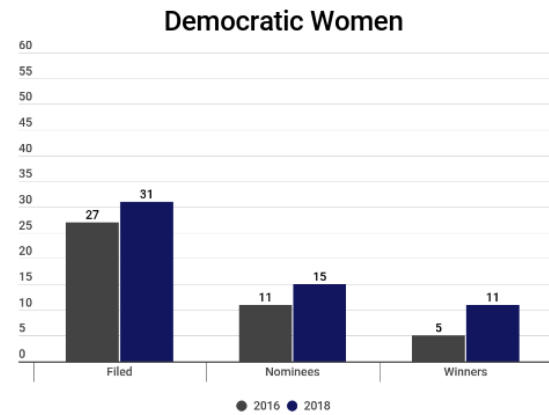
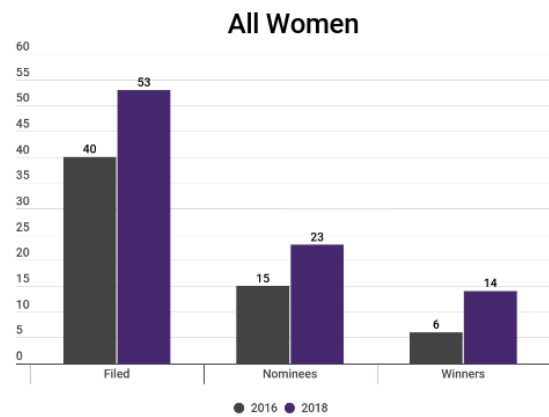


* Candidates for non-voting delegate positions are not included in these counts.

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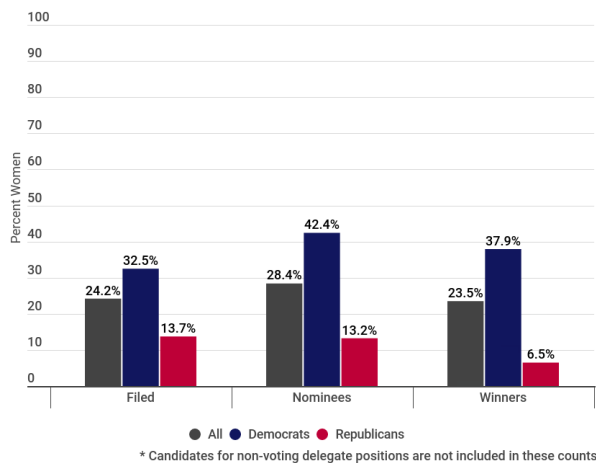
WOMEN CANDIDATES FOR THE US SENATE

2016-2018

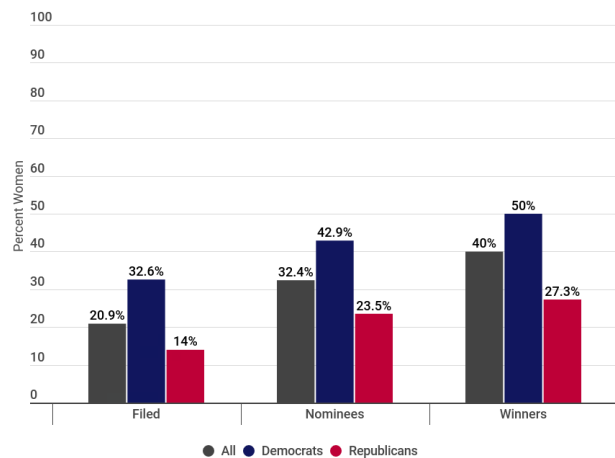


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Women as a Percentage of All U.S. House Candidates
2018



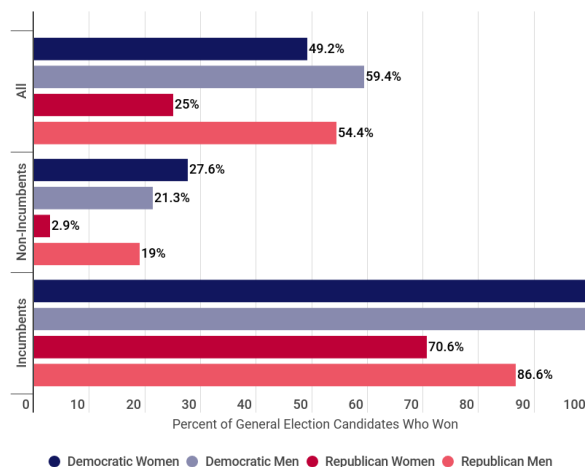
Women as a Percentage of All U.S. Senate Candidates
2018



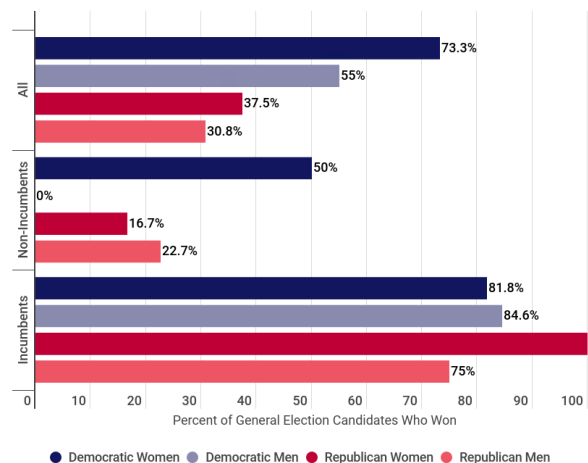
election, women won 21 – or 53.8% – and men won 18.⁴ Across all contests, Democratic non-incumbent women nominees for the U.S. House outperformed non-incumbent Democratic men, Republican men, and Republican women.⁵ Republican women fared worst of all 4 groups groups, and all 5 women House incumbents who were defeated in the 2018 election were Republicans: Barbara Comstock (R-VA), Karen Handel (R-GA), Mia Love (R-UT), Claudia Tenney (R-NY), and Mimi Walters (R-CA).

In U.S. Senate contests, 2 of 4 Democratic non-incumbent women candidates were successful while none of the 7 Democratic non-incumbent men were elected. However, both incumbent women senators defeated in the 2018 election were Democrats: Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) and Claire McCaskill (D-MO). Among Republicans, Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) was the only non-incumbent woman to win in 2018, becoming the first woman senator from Tennessee. No Republican women Senate incumbents were defeated.

U.S. House General Election Win Rates, by Gender and Party
2018



U.S. Senate General Election Win Rates, by Gender and Party
2018



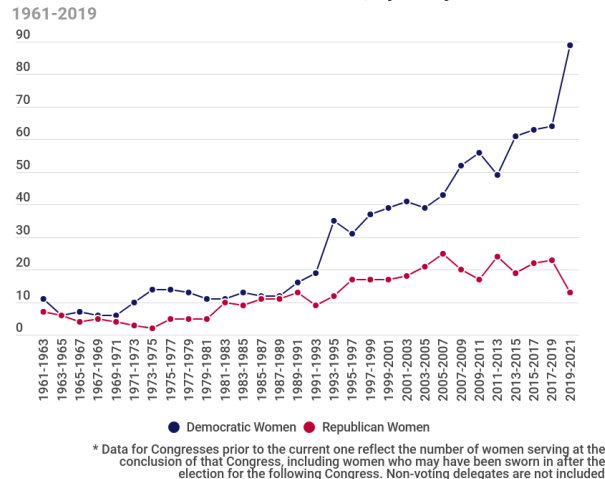
As a result of the 2018 election, the number of Republican women in the U.S. House dropped by 10 (from 23 to 13), while the number of Democratic women increased by 28 (from 61 to 89).⁶ In contrast, the number of Republican women in the U.S. Senate increased by 2 (from 6 to 8) from 2018 to 2019 and

⁵ These calculations refer to the percentage of nominees, not filed candidates, who won in the general election.

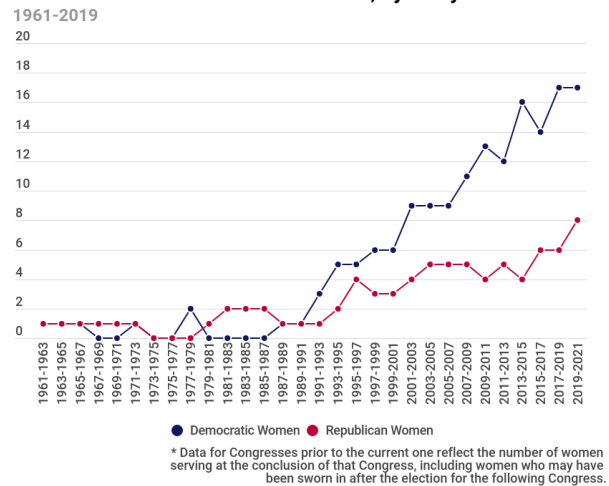
⁶ This increase includes the women members of the U.S. House who were elected to the 116th Congress (2019-2021) in 2018, but were sworn in to complete a previous term before 2019.

the number of Democratic women stayed the same at 17.⁷ As of October 2019, women are 23.7% of the members of the 116th Congress, including 102 (89D, 13R) women in the U.S. House and 25 (17D, 8R) women in the U.S. Senate.⁸

Number of Women in the U.S. House, by Party



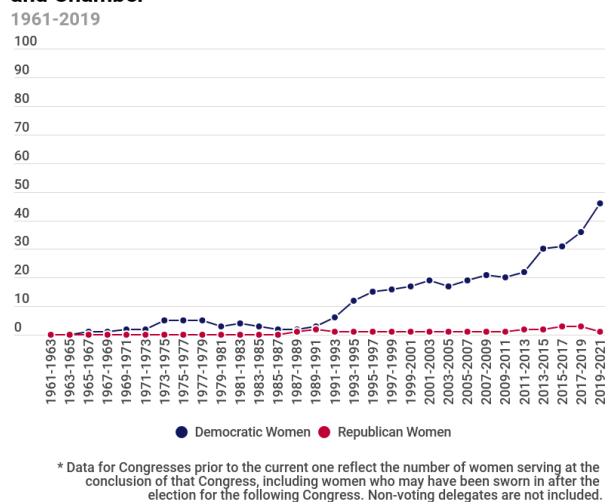
Number of Women in the U.S. Senate, by Party



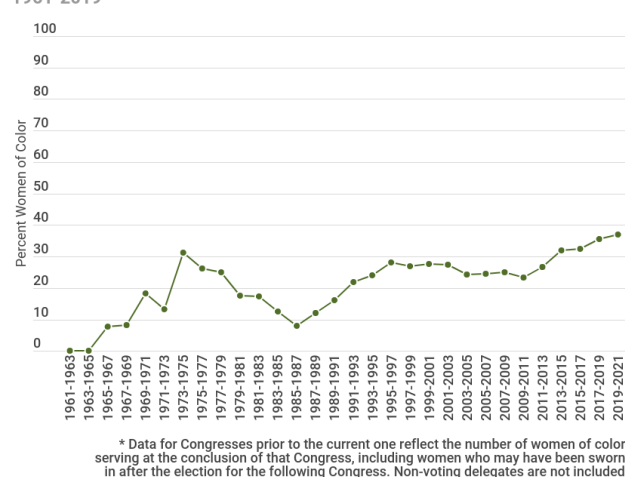
Racial and Ethnic Diversity

As a result of the 2018 election, there are a record number of women of color in Congress. While the number of women of color senators remained the same (4) from 2018 to 2019, the number of women of color in the U.S. House increased to a record 43. Women of color are nearly 50% of Democratic women and close to 40% of all members of color serving in U.S. House, but a smaller proportion of senators and Republicans in 2019.⁹

Number of Women of Color in Congress, by Party and Chamber



Women of Color as a Percentage of All Women in Congress



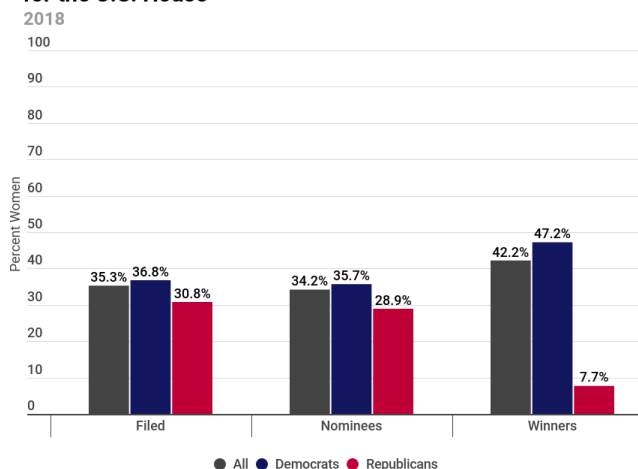
⁷ Martha McSally (R-AZ) is included here. She was appointed to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate (after losing in the November election for Arizona's other Senate seat), but was sworn in on the same day as all other new members of the 116th Congress.

⁸ In addition to the 102 women currently serving, four (2D, 2R) women delegates also represent American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

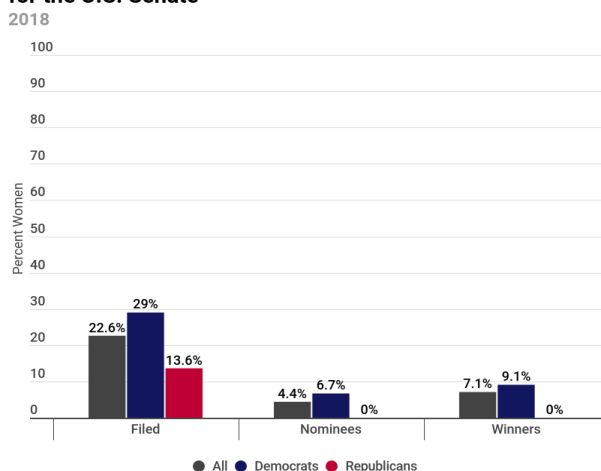
⁹ Data on all members of color from the [Congressional Research Service](#) (updated June 2019), with author addition of two Palestinian-American members of the U.S. House. All four women non-voting delegates in the U.S. House are women of color, but non-voting delegates are not included in this count.

Women of color were 34% of women U.S. House nominees, but just one of 23 (4.3%) women nominees for the U.S. Senate in 2018. Incumbent Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI), who was re-elected in 2018, was the only woman of color nominee for the U.S. Senate. One incumbent woman of color congresswoman was unsuccessful in her bid for re-election: Representative Mia Love (R-UT), the first and only Black Republican woman in Congress. Among the 49 non-incumbent women of color nominees for the U.S. House, 13 (26.5%) were successful, 35 (71.4%) were defeated, and one withdrew before Election Day.

Women of Color as a Percentage of All Women Candidates for the U.S. House

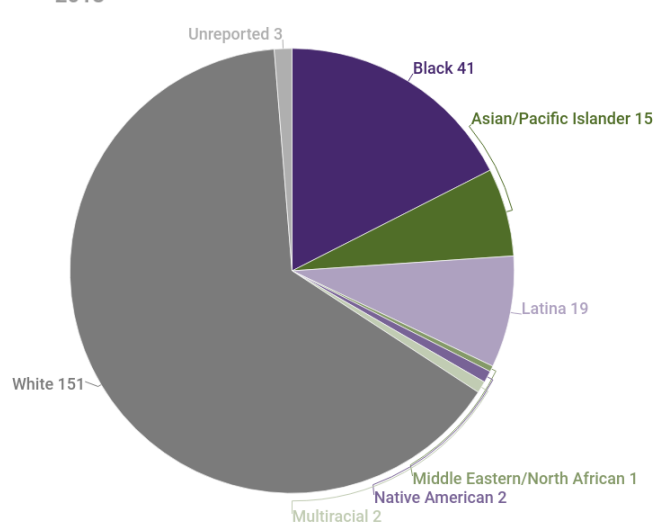


Women of Color as a Percentage of All Women Candidates for the U.S. Senate



The number of non-incumbent women of color elected in 2018 was also a record high; 13 new women of color, all Democrats, joined the U.S. House, up from a previous record of 6 (first set in 2012). They represent more than one-third of the freshman class of women representatives in the 116th Congress. Of the 13 new women of color elected to the 116th Congress, 5 (38.5%) were elected in majority-White districts. By comparison, 4 of 30 (13.3%) incumbent women of color who won in 2018 were elected in majority-White districts.¹⁰ This indicates growth in the diversity of districts where women of color run and win and counters biased notions that women of color cannot win in majority-White electorates.

Women Nominees for the U.S. House, by Race



¹⁰ This does not include Representative Joyce Beatty (D-OH), whose district is 49.9% white, according to the U.S. Census 1-year estimates for 2017 from the American Community Survey.

Included among the 13 new women of color members of the U.S. House are:

- 5 Latinas
- 5 Black women, including the first women of color sent to Congress from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Minnesota
- The first 2 Native American women to ever serve in Congress, including the first woman of color sent to Congress from Kansas
- The first Middle Eastern/North African woman to serve in Congress
- The first 2 Muslim women elected to Congress

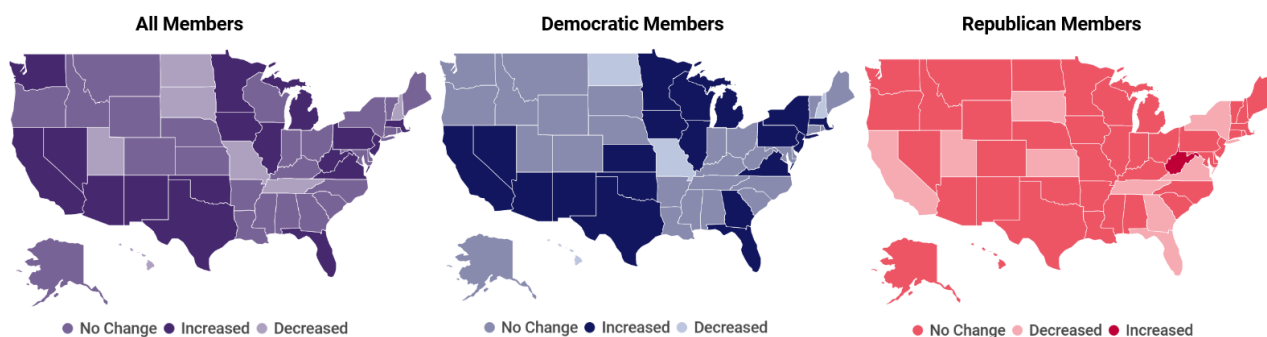
As of 2019, 26 states have never sent a woman of color to Congress, including 46 states that have never sent a woman of color to the U.S. Senate and 27 states that have never sent a woman of color to the U.S. House.

Differences by State

The number of women in states' congressional delegations (U.S. House and Senate) went up in 17 states, went down in 7 states, and stayed the same in 26 states as a result of the 2018 election.¹¹ While Democratic women gained seats in 19 states' congressional delegations from 2018 to 2019, just 1 state increased its number of Republican women in Congress as a result of election 2018. In 2019, women are 50% or more of all members of Congress in 7 states (up from 5 in 2018), while 12 states have no women representing them in Congress in 2019 (up from 11 in 2018). Vermont remains the only state that has never sent a woman to Congress.

Change in Women's Representation in U.S. Congressional Delegations, by State and Party

2018-2019



* Martha McSally (R-AZ) is included here. She was appointed to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate (after losing in the November election for Arizona's other Senate seat), but was sworn in on the same day as all other new members of the 116th Congress.

In the House alone, 15 state delegations saw an increase, 6 states saw a drop, and 29 states saw no change in women's representation. Democratic women's House representation increased in 17 House delegations from 2018 to 2019, while Republican women's House representation decreased in 10 states as a result of the 2018 election. Women are 50% or more of House delegations in 9 states (up from 7 in

¹¹ Martha McSally (R-AZ) is included here. She was appointed to fill a vacancy in the U.S. Senate (after losing in the November election for Arizona's other Senate seat), but was sworn in on the same day as all other new members of the 116th Congress.

2018), while 16 states have no women representing them in the U.S. House in 2019 (down from 17 in 2018). In 2018, Iowa elected women to the U.S. House for the first time in its history.

Women made gains in 3 of 33 states with U.S. Senate elections in 2018. Both Tennessee and Arizona elected their first women senators – Republican Marsha Blackburn in Tennessee and Democrat Kyrsten Sinema in Arizona. The defeat of 2 incumbent Democratic women senators meant that Missouri and North Dakota lost their representation of women in the Senate.

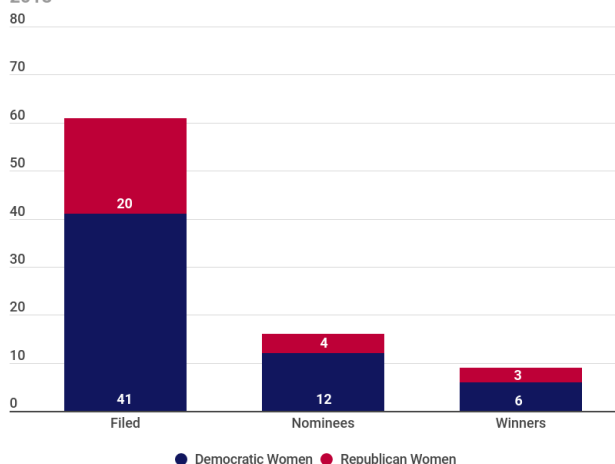
With the appointment of Martha McSally (R) in 2019, Arizona became 1 of 6 states with all-female Senate delegations.¹² Nevada, which gained women’s Senate representation as a result of the 2018 election, also now has an all-female Senate delegation. With the election of Cindy Hyde-Smith in 2018 to a seat she had previously been appointed to, Mississippi also elected its first woman to a U.S. Senate seat.

GOVERNOR

A record number of women filed for, won nomination for, and were elected governor in election 2018, though the total number of women serving as governors in 2019 *matches* the previous high of 9. The number of women who filed as candidates for governor more than doubled from 2014 (30) to 2018 (61), the last year in which a comparable number of gubernatorial races were contested, and far exceeded the previous record for filed women gubernatorial candidates for governor (34), which was set in 1994. While Democratic women broke another record for their number of gubernatorial nominees (12) in 2018, Republican women’s nominations (4) did not reach a record high.

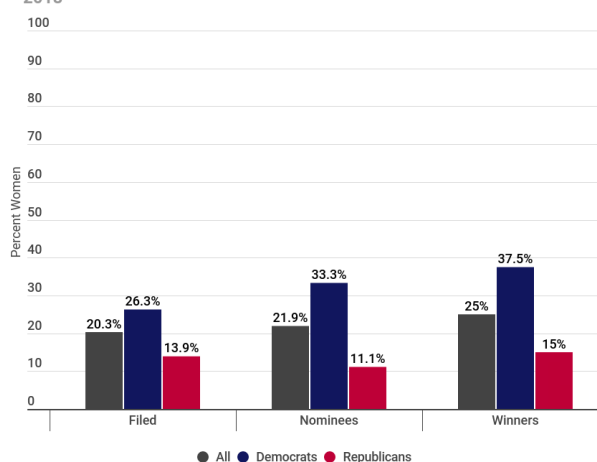
Women Candidates for Governor

2018



Women as a Percentage of All Gubernatorial Candidates

2018



Across parties, women were less than one quarter of all filed candidates, nominees, and winners in the 36 races that were contested in the fall of 2018. While still not reaching parity with men, Democratic women were a larger proportion of their party’s candidates and winners than were Republican women.

¹² Of the 6 all-female Senate delegations in 2019, only Arizona’s includes a Republican woman.

Women Nominees for Governor 2018

DEFEATED



Stacey Abrams (D-GA)
First Black Woman Major Party
Nominee for Governor in U.S.



Christine Hallquist (D-VT)
First Openly Transgender Major
Party Nominee for Governor in U.S.



Molly Kelly (D-NH)



Paulette Jordan (D-ID)
First Native American Woman
Major Party Nominee for
Governor in U.S.



Mary Throne (D-WY)



Andria Tupola (R-HI)



Lupe Valdez (D-TX)
First Openly LGBTQ and First
Latina Nominee for Governor of
Texas

ELECTED



Kate Brown (D-OR)
First Openly Bisexual Governor
in the U.S. (Appointed First in
2015, Elected First in 2016)



Kay Ivey (R-AL)
Appointed First in 2017



Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM)
First Democratic Woman of
Color and First Democratic
Latina Governor in the U.S.



Laura Kelly (D-KS)



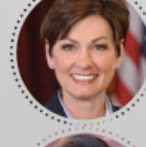
Janet Mills (D-ME)
First Woman Governor of Maine



Kristi Noem (R-SD)
First Woman Governor of South
Dakota



Gina Raimondo (D-RI)
First Woman Governor of Rhode
Island (Elected First in 2014)

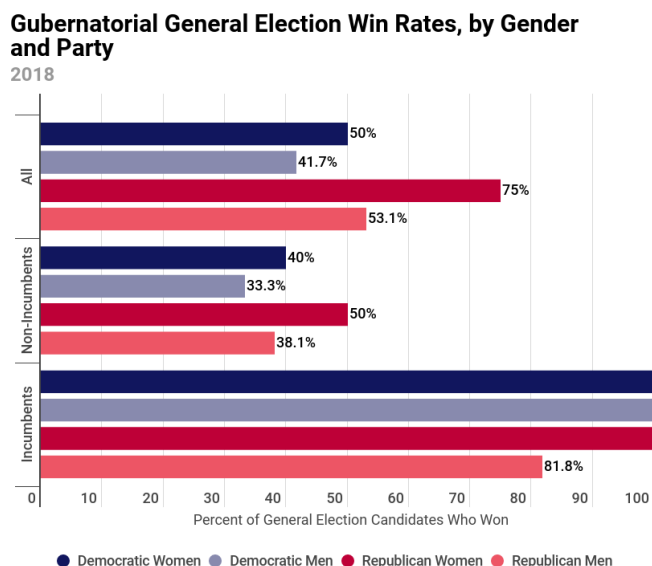


Kim Reynolds (R-IA)
First Woman Governor of Iowa
(Appointed First in 2017)

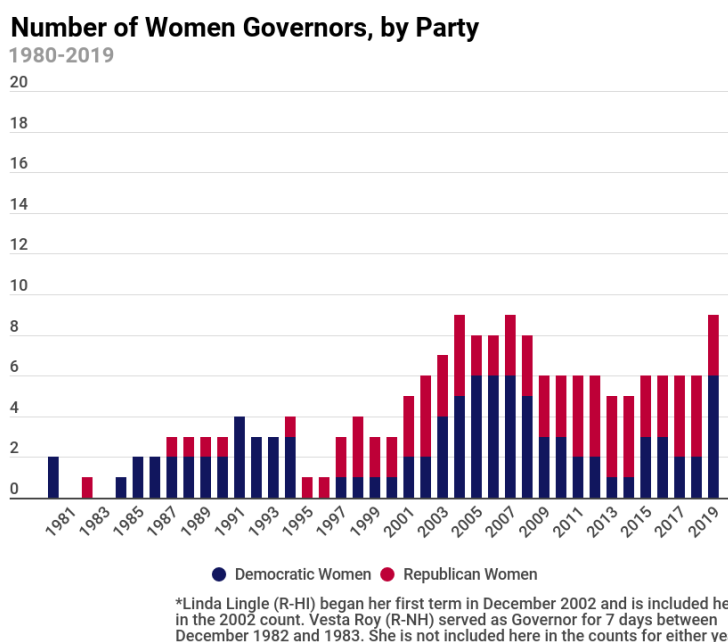


Gretchen Whitmer (D-MI)

Non-incumbent women candidates for governor (Democrat and Republican) fared slightly better than their male counterparts in election 2018, but were still only one-quarter (5 of 20) of all non-incumbent winners. Among the 5 women winners are the first women governors of Maine (Democrat Janet Mills) and South Dakota (Republican Kristi Noem).¹³ They also include 4 Democratic women who flipped governor's offices from Republican to Democrat in 2018; Democrats flipped 7 gubernatorial seats in total.¹⁴



With 2 Republican women governors term-limited out in 2018, the party division among women governors shifted from majority-Republican to majority-Democrat between 2018 and 2019. While the current number of Democratic women governors (6) and women governors overall (9) matches record highs, Republican women governors are one short of their all-time record (4).



Women remain just 18% of all governors in 2019 and 20 states have still never had a woman governor.

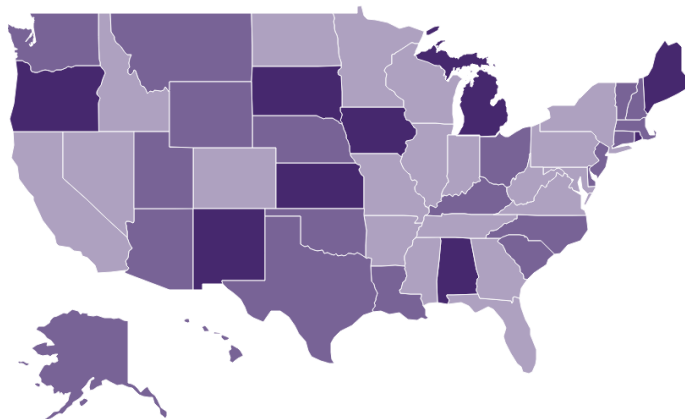
¹³ In Iowa, Governor Kim Reynolds (R) became her state's first woman elected governor in 2018, after being appointed in 2017.

¹⁴ Just one Republican, Mike Dunleavy (R-AK), flipped a gubernatorial seat in 2018 – from Independent to Republican.

Women Governors in the U.S.

Current and Historic Representation by State

- Current Woman Governor
- Past Woman Governor
- No Woman Governor to Date



Racial and Ethnic Diversity

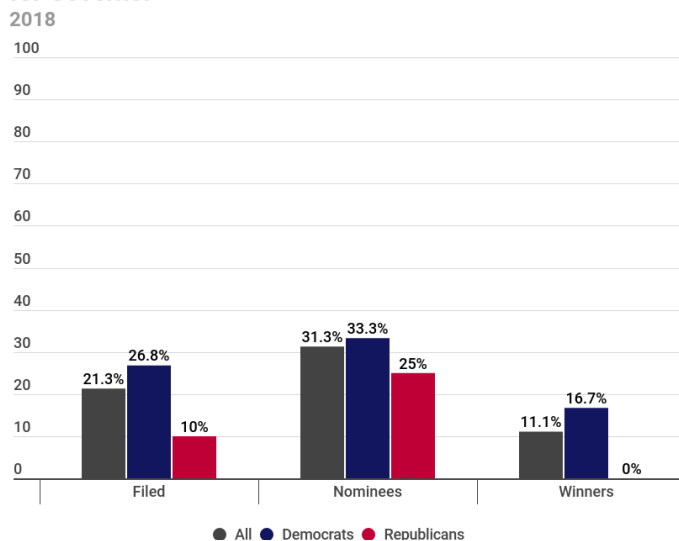
Prior to 2019, just two women of color – both Republicans – had ever served as governors in the United States. Governor Nikki Haley (R-SC), who is South Asian, and Governor Susana Martinez (R-NM), a Latina, were both elected for the first time in 2010.

In 2018, Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM) became the first Democratic woman of color elected governor of any state. She is also the only woman of color currently serving in gubernatorial office. She is 1 of 2 Democratic governors of color serving in 2019. No Black or Native American woman has ever served as governor in the United States.

Women of color were 13 of 61 (21.3%) of women gubernatorial candidates and 5 of 16 (31.3%) gubernatorial nominees in 2018, with partisan differences greater among filed candidates and winners. Though both were unsuccessful in the general election, included among the 5 (4D, 1R) women of color gubernatorial nominees were the first Native American woman (Idaho Democrat Paulette Jordan) and first Black woman (Georgia Democrat Stacey Abrams) nominees for governor in U.S. history.



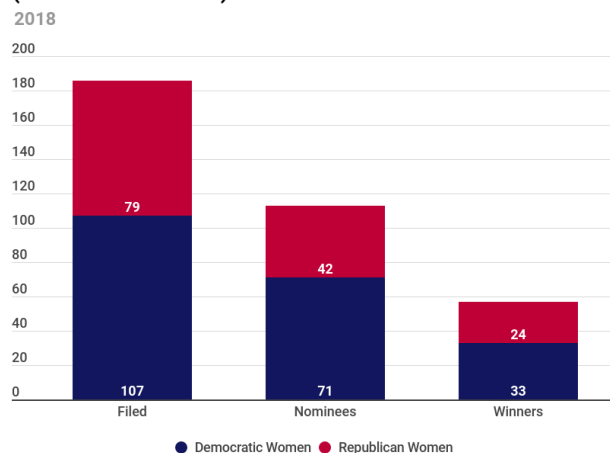
Women of Color as a Percentage of All Women Candidates for Governor



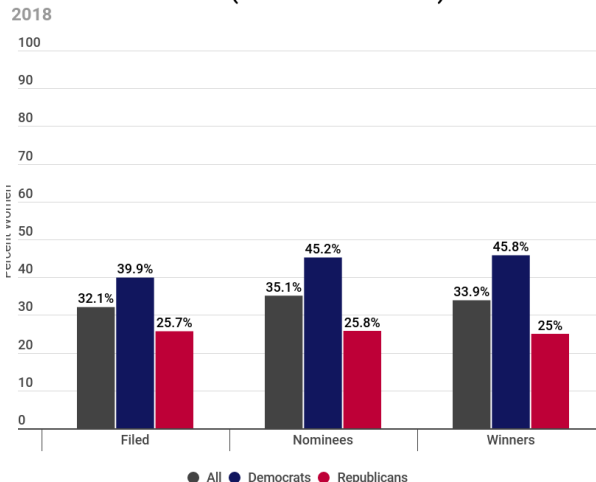
STATEWIDE ELECTED EXECUTIVE OFFICES OTHER THAN GOVERNOR

In addition to 50 governorships, there are 261 other statewide elected executive offices nationwide. Of these, 171 positions were in contention in the 2018 election. The number of women nominees and winners for these offices marked a new record in any single election cycle, and the number of women who filed as candidates for these contests increased by about 32% from 2014 (143) to 2018 (188), when a comparable number of races were contested.

Women Candidates for Statewide Elected Executive Office (other than Governor)



Women as a Percentage of All Statewide Elected Executive Candidates (other than Governor)



Women were just under one-third (32%) of all filed candidates and 35% of all nominees to run for statewide elected executive offices (other than governor) in 2018, though Democratic women neared parity with men among nominees and winners. Republican women were one of four Republican candidates, nominees, and winners in 2018. They were 42% of all women candidates and 36.8% of women nominees for these offices in 2018.

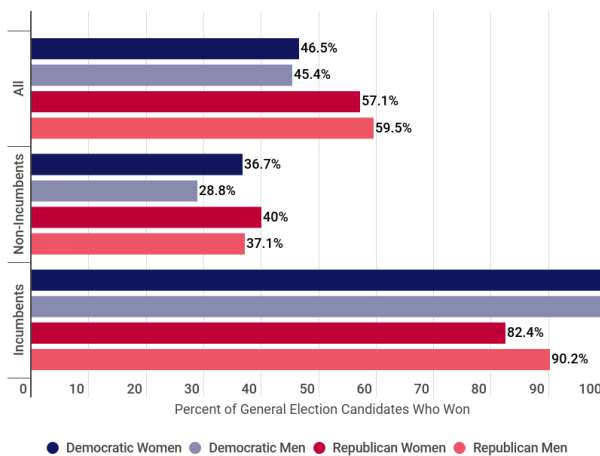
Both Democratic and Republican non-incumbent women nominees for statewide elective executive offices (other than governor) outperformed their male counterparts in the general election in rates of success. Still, though, women were 42% of all non-incumbent winners of 2018 contests and 6 women incumbents (all Republicans) lost their statewide elected executive seats.

Democratic women were responsible for flipping 15 of 26 (57.7%) statewide elected executive offices (other than governor) from Republican to Democrat-held as a result of election 2018. Just one Republican man flipped a statewide elected executive seat from Democrat to Republican-held in election 2018.

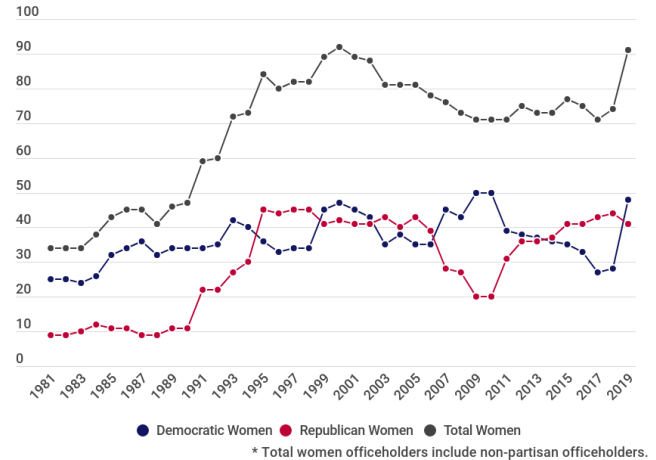
In 2019, 91 women hold statewide elected executive offices (29.3% of all officeholders), including 9 women governors and 82 women holding other offices (31.4% of all officeholders).¹⁵ The record high for women serving simultaneously in statewide elected executive offices other than governor is 89, set in 2000.

¹⁵ This includes three women appointed to statewide elected executive offices after Election Day 2018.

**Statewide Elected Executive Office (other than Governor)
General Election Win Rates, by Gender and Party**
2018



Number of Women Statewide Elected Executive Officeholders (including Governor), by Party
1981-2019

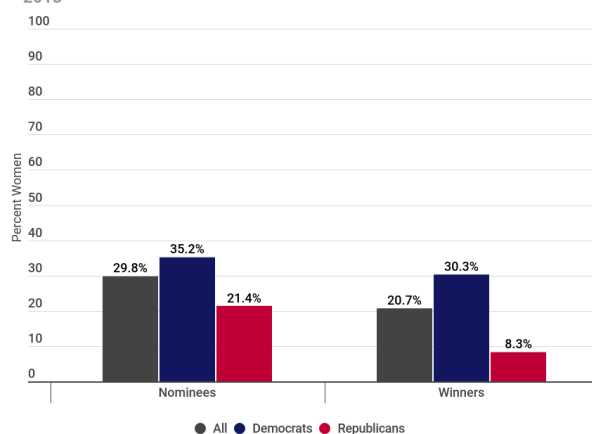


The party division among women statewide elected executive officeholders shifted from majority-Republican to majority-Democrat between 2018 and 2019.¹⁶ Other than governor, women are 31.4% of all, 42.3% of Democratic, and 23.9% of Republican statewide elected executive officeholders as of September 2019.

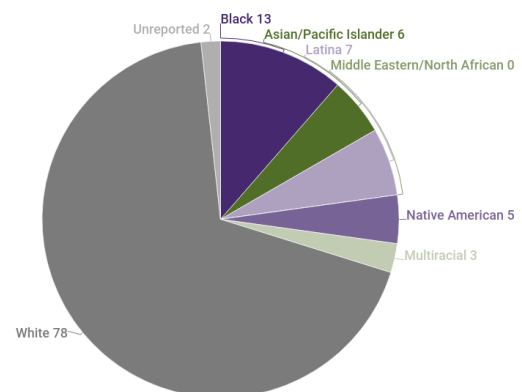
Racial and Ethnic Diversity

The underrepresentation of women of color as both candidates and officeholders has been historically stark at the statewide executive level. In 2018, there was some advancement in the racial and ethnic diversity among women running for and winning these offices. 34 (25D, 9R) women of color won nominations for statewide elected executive offices (other than governor) and 12 (10D, 2R) women of color were successful on Election Day 2018. They were about 30% of all women nominees and 20.7% of women winners.

Women of Color as a Percentage of All Women Candidates for Statewide Elected Executive Office (other than Governor)
2018



Women Nominees for Statewide Elected Executive Offices (other than Governor), by Race
2018

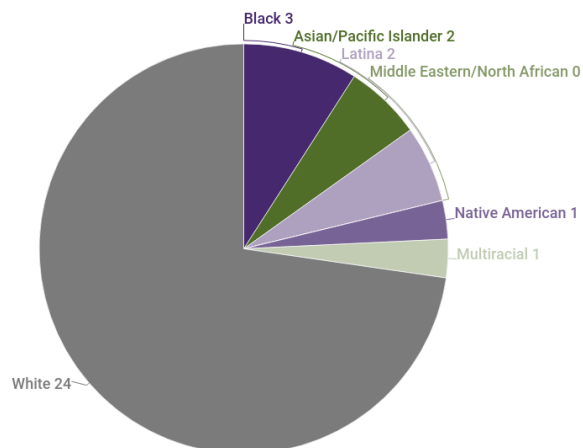


¹⁶ Two women serve in non-partisan offices.

Nine (7D, 2R) women of color were elected to statewide elected executive offices (other than governor) for the first time. Among these newly-elected women are officeholders making history:

- Peggy Flanagan (D-MN), elected as Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota, is the first woman of color elected to statewide executive office in Minnesota as well as just the second Native American woman ever elected to statewide executive office nationwide.
- With her election to the New York Attorney General's office, Letitia James is the first woman of color elected statewide in New York.
- Kimberly Yee, elected state treasurer, is the first Republican woman of color serving statewide in Arizona.
- Jeanette Núñez is the first Latina elected to statewide office in Florida, following her election as lieutenant governor.

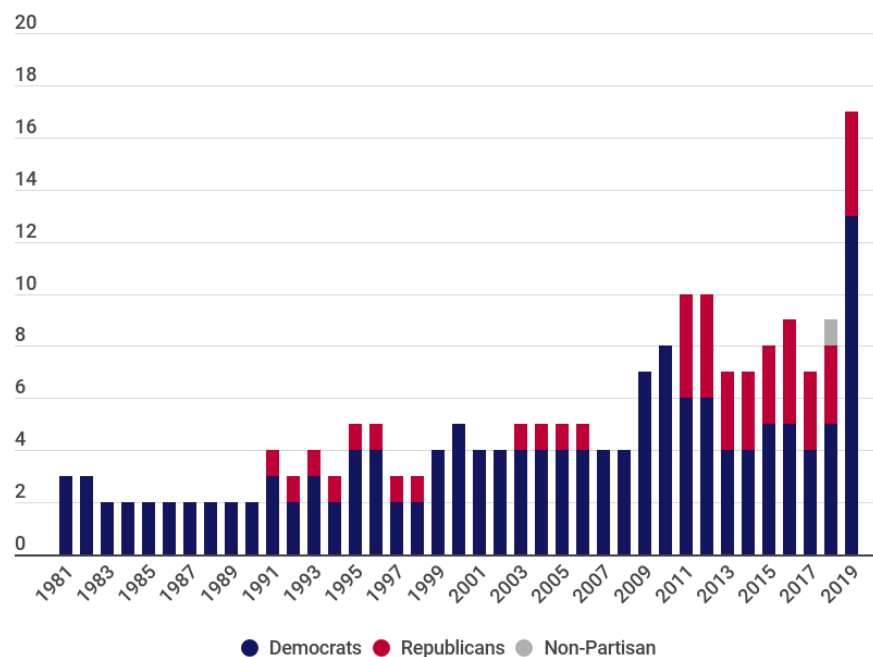
Women Non-Incumbent Winners for Statewide Elected Executive Offices (other than Governor), by Race
2018



Since the 2018 election, two more women of color have been selected to fill vacancies in statewide elected executive offices. In January 2019, Carolyn Stanford Taylor (D-WI) became Superintendent of Public Instruction of Wisconsin upon the inauguration of Governor Tony Evers (D), who previously held the position. Lea Márquez Peterson (R-AZ), a Latina, was selected by Governor Ducey to fill a vacancy on the Arizona Corporation Commission in May 2019.

Number of Women of Color in Statewide Elected Executive Offices (including Governor), by Party

1981-2019

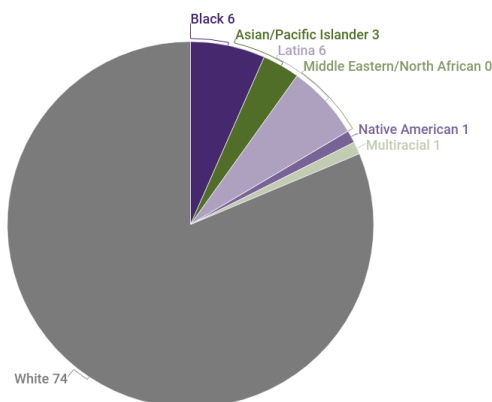


As of September 2019, 17 (13D, 4R) women of color serve in statewide elected executive offices, including 1 (1D) Latina governor. They represent 18.7% of all women in statewide elected executive offices and 19.5% of women in offices other than governor.

Women Statewide Elected Executive Officials (including Governor), by Race

2019

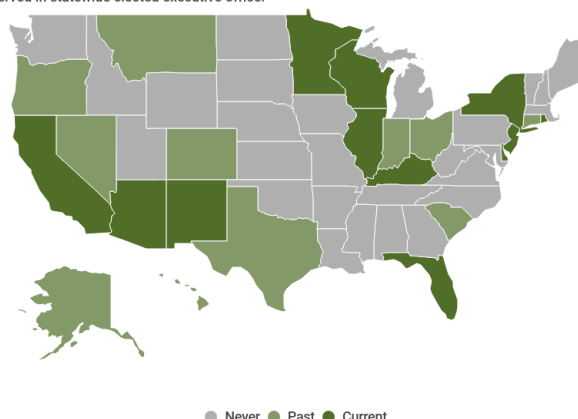
As of September 2019



Women of Color Statewide Executive Elected Officeholders (including Governor)

Current and Historic Representation by State

* States in green indicate states where at least one woman of color has served in statewide elected executive office.



Prior to 2019, just 38 (28D, 9R, 1NP) women of color had ever served in statewide elected executive offices, including governor. As of September 2019, 50 (37D, 12R, 1NP) women of color have held these posts, including 3 (2R, 1D) women of color who have served as governors. When viewed in this historical context, the gains for women of color from 2018 to 2019 are particularly notable. But the small numbers overall evidence the persistent and significant underrepresentation of women in statewide elected executive offices.

STATE LEGISLATURES

A record number of women won nomination and were elected to state legislatures in 2018. The number of women nominees for state legislative office increased by 29% from 2016 to 2018, the largest percentage increase in women's state legislative nominations for at least two decades. In fact, between 1992 and 2018, the number of major party women state legislative nominees never increased by more than 10% from one election year to the next.

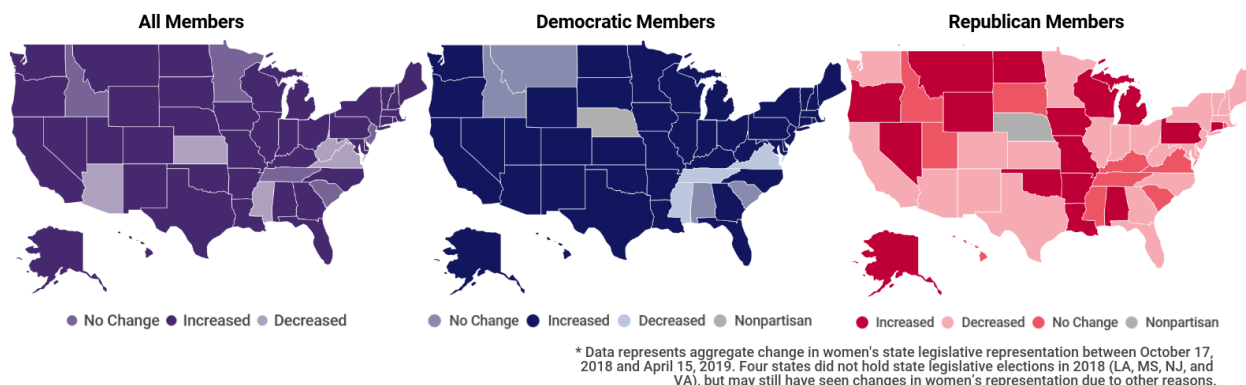
While the number of Democratic women state legislative nominees rose by 39% compared to 2016, Republican women's nominations rose by just 10%. From 2018 to 2019, women in the Democratic Party increased their overall representation in state legislatures by about 300 seats. Republican women, by contrast, saw their representation in state legislatures decline by just over 40 seats from 2018 to 2019.

The number of women in state legislatures (House and Senate) went up in 36 states, down in 6 states, and stayed the same in 8 states between 2018 and 2019.¹⁷ While Democratic women's representation

¹⁷ These counts refer to aggregate changes in women's state legislative representation between October 17, 2018 and April 15, 2019. Four states are included that did not hold state legislative elections in 2018 (LA, MS, NJ, and VA) are included, but may still have seen changes in women's representation due to other reasons.

Change in Women's Representation in State Legislatures, by State and Party

2018-2019

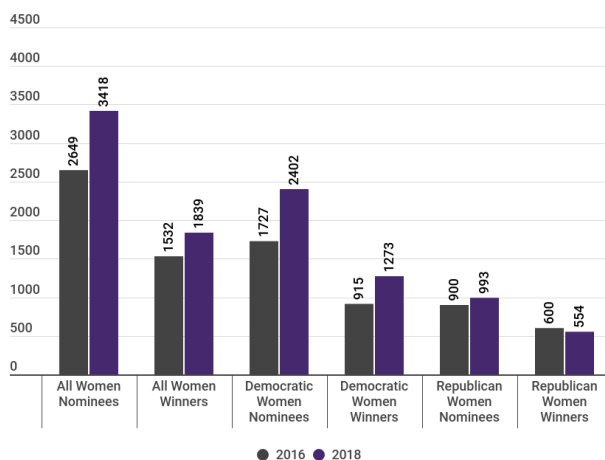


increased in 40 state legislatures from 2018 to 2019, Republican women gained seats in only 15 states, while their representation dropped in 22 states.¹⁸

1,839 of 3,418 (53.8%) women state legislative nominees won seats in 2018, including 29.9% of non-incumbent women nominees. Republican and Democratic non-incumbent women state legislative nominees fared equally well, but incumbent Republican women state legislators lost at a slightly higher rate than Democratic women incumbents.

Women State Legislative Nominees and Winners

2016-2018



In 2019, a state legislature reached parity in women's and men's representation for the first time in U.S. history. Following the 2018 election and a series of vacancy appointments, women hold 52.4% of seats in the Nevada legislature as of September 2019. Colorado, which ranks second for women's state legislative representation with 47% women overall, has a majority-woman chamber in its state house. Only one state legislative chamber had ever reached or surpassed parity before 2019; from 2009-2010, women held 13 of 24 seats in the New Hampshire State Senate.

As of September 2019, women were 28.9% of all state legislators nationwide, including 17.3% of Republican and 42% of Democratic state legislators.¹⁹ This is a record high for women's state legislative representation.

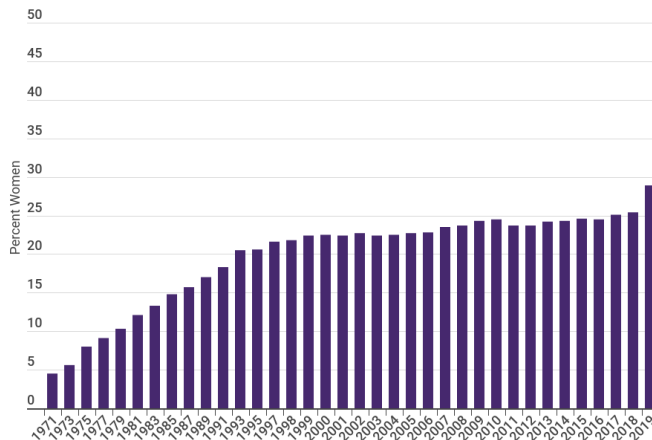
¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Multi-gender state legislative data from the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of August 29, 2019. Data on women state legislators from CAWP (as of September 22, 2019)

Women as a Percentage of All State Legislators

1971-2019

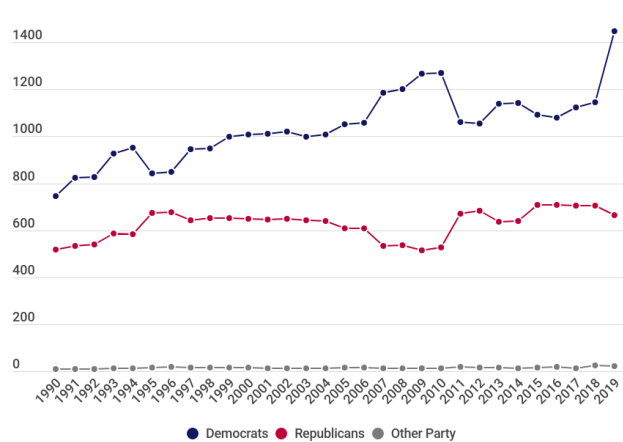
*As of September 2019



Number of Women in State Legislatures, by Party

1990-2019

1600



Of all women serving in state legislatures as of September 2019, 68% are Democrats and 31% are Republicans, representing a growing partisan gap in women's state legislative representation; before election 2018, 61% of women state legislators were Democrats and 38% were Republicans.

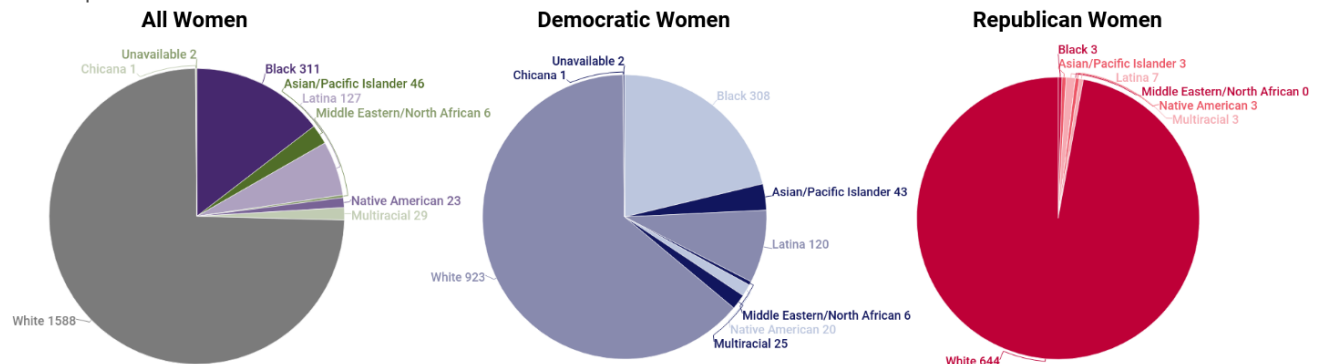
Racial and Ethnic Diversity

As of September 2019, women of color are 25.5% of all women state legislators and 7.4% of all state legislators, up from 24.3% and 6.1%, respectively, in 2018.

Women State Legislators, by Race and Party

2019

As of September 2019



1 (1D) woman state legislator identifies as Chicana, but not Latina. That identification is added here.

The number of women of color serving in state legislatures nationwide increased from 456 (429D, 26R, 1P) in 2018 to 543 (523D, 19R, 1P) in 2019. The number of Democratic women of color in state legislatures rose by nearly 100, while the number of Republican women of color declined by almost one-third between 2018 and 2019. Black women accounted for about half of the net increase in women of color state legislators in this time period.

WHY & HOW WOMEN RUN

Evaluating progress for women in election 2018 requires analyses that go beyond the numbers. More women ran for office in 2018 than in previous cycles, but why? And how did women campaign? Asking both why and how women ran for office in 2018 and are running in 2020 reveals

There is no single story for why women ran in 2018, but candidacy was among the tools that some women employed as part of the #resistance to President Trump and the Republican Party.

- While much of the research on and work to encourage women to run focuses on making the positive case for candidacy and officeholding, many women said negative emotions – such as anger, urgency, or fear – motivated their decisions to run in 2018.
- In many cases, and particularly among Democratic women who were responsible for the surge in women running, those negative emotions were cued by the current President, as well as the broader agenda of the Republican Party.
- But contrary to some claims, there was no single story for why women ran in 2018; women cited multiple motivating factors for their candidacies, and the calculations for candidacy varied across women.
- Among the record number of women seeking the presidency are candidates similarly diverse in their identities, paths to office, and motivations for running. At the congressional level, some women candidates who were unsuccessful in 2018 are running again in 2020, and others are running to reclaim the seats they lost last cycle.

With fewer incumbent members of the U.S. House running for re-election in 2018 than in all but one (1992) election in the past half-century, the 2018 election offered nearly unprecedented structural opportunities for non-incumbent candidates, including women, to wage competitive campaigns.

- According to the Brookings Institution, 59 U.S. House incumbents did not run for re-election in 2018. Since 1946, the only year with more open seats was 1992.²⁰

The ways in which men and women ran for office in 2018, and are running in 2020, demonstrate (and contribute to) shifting gendered terrain in American politics.

- Women running in 2018, especially Democratic women, embraced gender as an electoral asset instead of a hurdle to overcome en route to Election Day. Likewise, women challenged gender and intersectional biases while campaigning, proving their power in disrupting instead of adapting to the prevailing rules of the game. Early signs indicate that similar strategies will be at play in 2020.
- In both 2018 and 2020, male candidates have provided examples of both reinforcing and disrupting the masculine dominance of U.S. campaigns. Democratic men have had to navigate shifting gendered terrain in both years, with male Democratic candidates confronting for the first time in presidential history questions about the potential electoral detriment of being a man.

²⁰ [Brookings Institution 2019](#); 67 House incumbents did not run for re-election in 1992 and another 19 were defeated in congressional primaries. In 2018, 4 House incumbents were defeated in primary elections.

WHY WOMEN RUN

What spurred women's rise in candidacies in 2018? This question became a focus of much popular media attention throughout the 2018 election, yielding a dominant narrative that Democratic women – who accounted for nearly all of the surge in women's candidacies – were mobilized primarily by the election of Donald Trump to not only increase their overall political engagement, but to engage as candidates for office. While Trump's election appeared to be among many motivators for women's bids, the stories about why women ran for office in 2018 are both more diverse and complex.

Research on the emergence of women candidates focuses primarily on hurdles to candidacy, identifying social, political, and structural barriers that women may encounter.²¹ Male-dominated recruitment and funding networks, formal and informal exclusion of women from political institutions, the power of incumbency, and gender biases in perceptions of who and what qualifies for candidacy and officeholding are among the myriad factors shown to have hindered women's access to the political sphere historically.

Some research has also pointed to women's dearth of political ambition – the desire to run for office – as depressing the numbers of women candidates.²² But it is difficult to disentangle women's reluctance to run for office from the deterrents that inform their decision-making. For example, if voters hold women to higher standards for qualifications and competency, it may be rational for women to express more concern that they can meet those standards.²³ Relatedly, gendered patterns of socialization that limit exposure to women's public leadership and discourage young women from expressing leadership qualities and ambition may alter their political interest and diminish their likelihood of running for office.²⁴ Finally, in a cost-benefit calculation, women might determine that the benefits of candidacy and officeholding do not outweigh the costs.²⁵

What alters that calculation for women? According to previous research from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), women are more likely than men to make decisions about candidacy that are relationally-embedded, "influenced by the beliefs and reactions, both real and perceived, of other people and to involve considerations of how candidacy and officeholding would affect the lives of others with whom the potential candidate has close relationships."²⁶ Likewise, recruitment and encouragement – particularly from political sources – are more influential in spurring candidacy among women than among men.²⁷ Other research touts the value of less direct encouragement, such as role modeling, inspiration, and training programs that reduce women's doubts and affirm the possibility of electoral success.²⁸ Moreover, making an affirmative case for candidacy that emphasizes women's capacity to solve problems and make positive policy change once in office can enhance their likelihood of running.²⁹ Importantly,

²¹ See for example [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#); [Crowder-Meyer 2013](#); [Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994](#); [Fulton et al. 2006](#); [Kanthak and Woon 2015](#); [Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010](#); [Niven 1998, 2006](#); [Oliver and Conroy 2018](#); [Sanbonmatsu 2006](#); [Shames 2017](#)

²² [Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010](#)

²³ [Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2012, 2019](#); [Ditonto 2017](#); [Ditonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk 2014](#); [Fulton and Dhima 2019](#); [Fulton et al. 2006](#)

²⁴ [Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006](#); [Lawless and Fox 2015](#); [Wolbrecht and Campbell 2017](#)

²⁵ [Shames 2017](#)

²⁶ [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#), 45

²⁷ [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#); [Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009](#)

²⁸ See for example [Hennings 2011](#); [Kreitzer and Osborn 2018](#); [Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018](#); [Perry 2018](#); [Sweet-Cushman 2018](#); [Sanbonmatsu 2015](#); [Sanbonmatsu and Dittmar forthcoming](#)

²⁹ [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#); [Shames 2017](#); [Dittmar, Carroll, and Sanbonmatsu 2018](#); see also [Wittman 1983](#)

CAWP's research on women's paths to political office suggests that nascent ambition is not necessary to spur women's candidacies; instead, ambition and candidacy can arise simultaneously, courtesy of catalyzing forces like encouragement or shifting political contexts that alter their cost-benefit calculations.³⁰

While much of the work done to increase women's representation has focused on reducing costs and touting benefits of candidacy and officeholding, some research suggests that political engagement can also be spurred when the costs of *not* participating are deemed too high. More specifically, emotions like anxiety, anger, urgency – often cued by perceptions of threat – have been shown to motivate political engagement or action, particularly among groups who see themselves or their interests most at risk.³¹ Evidence from 2016 and 2018 shows these emotions mobilized activism and voter turnout among progressives, women, and communities of color.³²

Paying attention to the complex calculus that women apply in deciding whether or not to run for political office and recognizing the diversity in women's paths to political candidacy will better position practitioners to encourage more women to throw their hats into the ring.

Why Women Ran in 2018

The “surge” in women's candidacies for office occurred after the election of Donald Trump and alongside heightened activism among women against his administration and his party's policy agendas, leading to many media narratives that conflated the two phenomena. Women dominated the #resistance; for example, they made up the majority of leaders and members of local organizations that took shape after the 2016 election, accounted for the majority of progressive activists' calls to members of Congress in 2017, and organized Women's Marches nationwide in January 2017, 2018, and 2019.³³ In interviews with women campaign volunteers for three women congressional candidates in 2018, Kathleen Rogers found that they attributed their motivation to negative emotions like anger and fear – especially directed at President Trump and the Republican Party – more often than positive emotions like hope.³⁴

Women – and especially women of color – have long fueled protest movements in moments of turmoil and change.³⁵ But advocacy has not always translated into political candidacy, due to both significant barriers to entry and historical exclusion that made extra-institutional avenues to effecting change more feasible. In 2018, however, there was a simultaneous rise in both women's activism and candidacy, at least among Democrats. While some activists did directly translate advocacy into candidacy, a more apt description of 2018 dynamics is that candidacy was among the types of political engagement cued for some women by the political context around and after election 2016. Still, the limited research conducted on what motivated women to run for office in 2018 affirms that women's paths to candidacy were as

³⁰ [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#)

³¹ [Almeida 2003](#); [Campbell 2003](#); [DeMora et al. 2019](#); [Jasper 1997](#); [Kahneman and Tversky 1979](#); [Marcus, MacKuen, and Neuman 2000](#); [Miller and Krosnick 2004](#); [Miller et al. 2016](#); [Parker and Barreto 2013](#); [Tilly 1978](#); [Valentino et al. 2008](#); [Valentino et al. 2011](#); [Van Dyke and Soule 2002](#); Some studies, such as [Huddy \(2013\)](#) and [Lerner and Keltner \(2000, 2001\)](#) caution that anxiety can dampen political engagement or action.

³² [Bunyasi and Smith 2018](#); [Gutierrez et al. 2019](#); [Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Krogstad 2018](#); [Pantoja 2018](#); [Putnam and Skocpol 2018](#); [Towler and Parker 2018](#); for exception, see [Phoenix 2017](#).

³³ [Alter 2018](#); [Putnam and Skocpol 2018](#)

³⁴ [Rogers 2019](#)

³⁵ See for example [Giddings 1984](#); [Wolbrecht 2018](#)

diverse as the women who ran. Women candidates included long-time politicians as well as first-time candidates, activists-turned-candidates, and policy experts motivated by perceived threats to their work. Also, candidates' – including women's – political experience proved to be a key predictor of winning Democratic nominations in congressional races.³⁶

A review of non-incumbent women House candidates' publicly reported statements of why they chose to run in 2018 shows, consistent with previous research, that policy motivations were the most frequently cited.³⁷ A commitment to service and advocacy, desire to promote democratic values, and devotion to finding solutions in a particularly contentious political time were among other motivating factors most frequently mentioned by women candidates. And while they would be less likely to discuss them in public, women candidates certainly considered the political opportunities afforded to them in calculating whether or not to run. For example, now-Representative Madeleine Dean (D-PA04) cited as a motivating factor the electoral window created by the off-cycle redrawing of congressional district lines in her state. She announced her candidacy by noting, "This week's creation of a new congressional district in the county I love, represented, and lived in my entire life demanded consideration." In Florida's 27th congressional district, the retirement of Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R) created an open seat for which multiple women were motivated to run. Republican primary candidate Bettina Rodriguez Aguilera explained, "When I saw that [Ros-Lehtinen] was not going to be running again, I thought that was interesting, and I had several people from the community call me and ask me to consider running." She added, "I have been involved in community activism, human rights, economic development and international affairs all my life, and I feel that this is a good fit for me." Many more women, especially Democrats, likely saw a political opportunity to run in 2018 after significant successes for Democratic women in 2017 state legislative contests in Virginia.³⁸ These electoral calculations are commonplace in all candidates' decision-making, reflecting a consistent, not episodic or distinct, factor considered by potential candidates across election cycles.

But was there something distinct to women candidates' calculations about running in 2018? One possibility was that Hillary Clinton's presidential candidacy, historic nomination and popular vote win, and/or ultimate loss could have influenced women's likelihood of running for office in 2018. While there is no comprehensive evidence on the magnitude or directionality of any "Clinton effect," research from Chris Bonneau and Kristin Kanthak suggests that Clinton's influence on women's political ambition was dependent, at least, on their feelings toward her; viewing a video of candidate Clinton in fall 2016 helped to close the gender gap in political ambition among Clinton supporters, while the same cue appeared to have a negative effect on political ambition among women who did not support Clinton.³⁹ Another test of a possible "Clinton effect" found that exposure to Clinton's candidacy increased enthusiasm and the likelihood of future political engagement only among well-educated women.⁴⁰ Other data indicate that Clinton's defeat may have raised concerns about voters' likelihood of supporting women candidates. For example, while 41% of women told Pew Research Center in 2014 that Americans not being ready to elect a woman to higher office was a major reason for women's political underrepresentation, that number jumped to 57% in 2018.⁴¹ There was no significant change in perceptions among men over that period. If

³⁶ [Conroy, Nguyen, Rakich 2018](#)

³⁷ Dittmar 2019; Publicly reported statements include candidate statements made on their campaign websites, social media, and/or in public interviews with media.

³⁸ [Dittmar 2017](#)

³⁹ [Bonneau and Kanthak 2018](#)

⁴⁰ Demora et al. 2019

⁴¹ [Horowitz, Igielnik, and Parker 2018](#)

American women's skepticism about voters' support for women candidates increased ahead of the 2018 election, there is reason to suspect that it could have had a chilling effect on candidate emergence, at least among some women.

While there is little evidence to prove that Clinton's candidacy had a directly motivating or chilling effect on the women who ran for office in 2018, her candidacy and defeat certainly made discussions of gender and representation even more salient. Both in the review of women's publicly reported candidate motivation statements and in interviews with 2018 defeated House candidates, a desire for more representative government stands out among women's – and especially women of color's – motivating factors for candidacy.⁴² For example, Fayrouz Saad, a Democratic candidate in Michigan's 11th congressional district, told [The Detroit News](#) that it was important to her to give voice to Muslim and Arab American communities in Congress, "especially in the critical moment we're in right now, when Republicans in Congress and certainly Trump and his administration will take any chance to take a jab at these more vulnerable communities."

Saad's reference to Trump, and more specifically to the threat he represents to her communities, reveals an alternative source of motivation to run for office in 2018. Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox explored "The Trump Effect" in a 2017 survey of more than 2,000 potential candidates for office.⁴³ They found that negative feelings toward Trump were strong among Democratic women, and that those feelings appeared to spur heightened political participation. For example, Democratic women who were appalled or depressed by Trump's election were two times as likely as respondents who did not share those reactions to communicate about politics via social media, sign a letter or petition, donate to a candidate or cause, attend the Women's March or other rally, and join a political interest group in the six months after the 2016 election.⁴⁴ Likewise, a recent survey experiment finds that Democratic women exposed to Trump's misogynistic behaviors and comments expressed heightened levels of both anger and fear, and that these negative emotions increased women's reported likelihood of future political participation.⁴⁵ The tie between emotion and engagement is more complicated when it comes to women's candidacy calculus. In their survey of potential candidates, Lawless and Fox found that the gender gap in political ambition persisted after Trump's election. However, they also found that among those respondents who had considered running for office, more than 25% of Democratic women had first thought about it in the six months after Election Day 2016.⁴⁶

Most of those surveyed by Lawless and Fox in 2017 were considering candidacies far beyond 2018, but there are indications that "The Trump Effect" was real among some women who ran in the midterm elections. In interviews with women who ran for the U.S. House in 2018 and lost, twice as many said that Trump had an impact on their decision to run as said it did not.⁴⁷ Nearly half of all Democratic women non-incumbents running for the U.S. House expressed in public statements at least one of four negative emotions (anger, frustration, urgency, or perception of threat) as motivating their bid for office.⁴⁸ In some

⁴² Dittmar 2019; Dolan, Shah, and Stripp 2019

⁴³ "Potential candidates" included full-time employed, college-educated women and men in Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox's study.

⁴⁴ [Lawless and Fox 2018](#), 673

⁴⁵ DeMora et al. 2018

⁴⁶ [Lawless and Fox \(2018\)](#) find that Democratic women were nearly three times more likely than Democratic men to have first thought about running for office within the six months of Trump's election (676).

⁴⁷ Dolan, Shah, and Stripp 2019, 6

⁴⁸ Dittmar 2019

cases, these negative emotions were directly tied to Trump in candidates' statements, as when now-Representative Donna Shalala (D-FL27) said in her [announcement video](#), "Everything we fought for throughout our lives is under attack under the slogan 'Make America Great Again.'" Even more directly, Pennsylvania candidate Rachel Reddick, a Democratic candidate in Pennsylvania's 1st congressional district, told [Philadelphia Magazine](#) in April 2018: "I'm running for Congress because after more than five years on active duty in the Navy, I watched Donald Trump apply to be my commander in chief and win the 2016 presidential election when he had no business doing so." Reddick added, "On election night, I promised my young son that I would do everything I could to fight back. After the last few months of my service, I left the military to become more engaged politically and fulfill that promise to my son."

Other women candidates reported less specific but equally urgent threats. For example, Washington Democratic candidate Shannon Hader, a Democratic candidate in Washington's 8th congressional district, explained on her campaign website, "We're at a turning point as a nation and this is an enormously important election. It has never been more urgent to make sure we turn things around and steer our district, state, and country in the right direction." Now-Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA07) told [ELLE Magazine](#) about her decision to challenge an incumbent member of her own party, "This is a defining moment for our country, and I believe it is a defining moment for the district. And I am refusing to play small."

This evidence adds important insights to the existing literature on candidate emergence among women, showing the role that catalyzing events and emotions can play in contributing to candidacy calculations. But it does not prove that the 2016 election, Donald Trump, or other emotions were primary motivators of women's candidacies in 2018; instead, they appeared to be *among* many factors that prompted women to make their decisions to run.

The limited findings from 2018 also affirm that women's paths to candidacy are not universal. Most clearly, the stimulating effect of the 2016 election on political participation and candidacy – as well as the negative emotions it cued – was limited to Democratic women. Little research from the midterm elections captures what motivated Republican women to run, though some of the most common factors cited in their publicly reported motivation statements include policy goals, preserving values, supporting President Trump, and opposing an increased size of government. Understandably, far fewer non-incumbent Republican women (just one in five) than Democratic women candidates expressed perceptions of threat, urgency, frustration, or anger in describing what motivated them to run in 2018, reinforcing the importance of challenging singular narratives about women's political experiences, motivations, and behavior.

The experience and effects of perceived threat from the political system are also likely to vary by candidate race. Analyzing data from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), Davin Phoenix found that anger was a less mobilizing force for Black than White respondents during election 2016. He writes, "Generally, African Americans appear to exhibit a bit of emotional resilience in response to an election environment that was characterized as turning many people 'mad as hell'."⁴⁹ In contrast, multiple studies, including one drawing upon the same 2016 survey data as Phoenix used, found greater political engagement among Latinas/os in election 2016 that appeared to be related to the *heightened*

⁴⁹ Phoenix 2017

⁵⁰ Gutierrez et al. 2019; Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, and Krogstad 2018; Pantoja 2018

political threats to the Latina/o community apparent in candidate Trump's rhetoric and policy agenda.⁵⁰ This difference in emotional perceptions and effects appeared in women candidates' motivation statements, with Black women candidates the least likely to reference a perception of threat in their discussion of why they ran in 2018. Together these data suggest that it is the shift in negative emotions that matters most to catalyzing political participation; the changing environment after the 2016 election likely elicited more shock from White women than women of color, who have never had the privilege of feeling free of threat in American society.

Constraints on the public expression of negative emotions may also influence how women of color describe their motivation to run or make their case to voters. For example, intersectional stereotyping of Black and Latina women may induce greater penalty for appearing angry or emotional.⁵¹ Additionally, women of color who express frustration with the direction in which our country is headed have both historically and recently been subject to heightened levels of surveillance and accusations of being unpatriotic.⁵² While not definitive, the evidence offered here complements existing research that challenges conclusions that assume women's motivations for and paths to candidacy are monolithic across race and ethnicity.⁵³

Women Running in 2020

Already in 2020 we are seeing the same variance in women's claims for why they have decided to become candidates for office. At the presidential level, six women entered the Democratic primary contest by February 2019. This not only tripled the record high for major party women presidential candidates in any one cycle, but also made stark the differences among women. In their [announcements of candidacy](#), the six women describe various motivating factors. Elizabeth Warren's announcement focused on curbing corruption, while Kirsten Gillibrand's entry video focused on her record of accomplishments. Both Kamala Harris ("Truth. Justice. Decency. Equality. Freedom. Democracy. They are all on the line now.") and Marianne Williamson ("What we share at this moment is deep concern — concern about the direction in which our country is headed, the assaults on our democratic foundations, and the erosion of our human values.") emphasized the urgency of this moment and the need to restore values. Both Tulsi Gabbard and Amy Klobuchar problematized political divisions, but Klobuchar emphasized a results-oriented approach and record of achievement, while Gabbard embraced a theme of love as the way forward.

When Shirley Chisholm became the first Democratic woman and first Black person to run for a major party presidential nomination in 1972, she said that she ran, at least in part, because "somebody had to do it first." Thanks to her and the other women who have waged presidential bids since Chisholm, women running today have more than one potential path to presidential candidacy.

⁵¹ Chemaly 2018; Cooper 2018; Torres 2003; Traister 2018

⁵² In response to their criticism of him and his administration's policies, President Trump has repeatedly [claimed](#) that Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib — called "The Squad" — do not love America. Attacking the same progressive congresswomen of color [appears to be a key tactic](#) for Republican candidates in 2020.

⁵³ Silva and Skulley 2019; Shah, Scott, and Juenke 2019; Holman and Schneider 2018

Some women running for Congress in 2020 are motivated to run again because they came close to electoral success in 2018. Candidates like Carolyn Bordeaux (D-GA), Yvette Herrell (R-NM), Young Kim (R-CA), and Gina Ortiz Jones (D-TX), [among others](#), are looking to turn marginal losses in 2018 into 2020 wins. And some incumbent women who lost in 2018, mostly Republican women including Karen Handel (R-GA) and Claudia Tenney (R-NY), are looking to reclaim their U.S. House seats in the next election. But 2020 will also bring a class of new women candidates from both sides of the aisle, including some who may have been inspired or mobilized by the success of women in 2018. That includes Democratic women challenging incumbents in their own parties as now-Representatives Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) did successfully in 2018, as well as Republican women running against the leftward push in Congress that they perceive as led by women who won in 2018.



LEFT IMAGE: U.S. House candidate Carolyn Bordeaux (D-GA07) is [asking voters](#) to help her “finish the job” in 2020, after losing in 2018 by less than 500 votes.

RIGHT IMAGE: U.S. House candidate Lynne Homrich (R-GA07) campaigns on a slogan of [“Results. Not Resistance.”](#)

Running as challengers to incumbents may also be more common for women in 2020 if the number of open seats returns to more traditional levels than we saw in 2018.⁵⁴ As of September 2019, 19 U.S. House incumbents had [announced](#) that they would not be running for re-election.⁵⁵ With more than a year before Election Day 2020, that number will likely rise, but it is uncertain if it will exceed the 59 open seats that created additional opportunities for women to run and win in 2018.

HOW WOMEN RUN

Decades of scholarship and strategy have considered *how* women run for office.⁵⁶ Backed by research showing incongruity between traits voters value in leaders and traits they associate with women, women candidates have historically sought to prove they are “man enough” for the job by touting credentials and expertise more often assumed of men, especially when running for executive offices.⁵⁷ There is evidence of success with these strategies, whereby women’s display of stereotypically male traits or expertise can assure voters of their capacity for political leadership.⁵⁸ But research also demonstrates the potential pitfalls for women who, while proving their masculine credentials, violate

⁵⁴ [Brookings Institution 2019](#)

⁵⁵ Updated numbers available via the U.S. House Press Gallery “Casualty List” for the current Congress: <https://pressgallery.house.gov/member-data/casualty-list>

⁵⁶ See for example [Dittmar 2015](#); [Kirkpatrick 1974](#); [Mandel 1981](#); [Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994](#)

⁵⁷ [Eagly and Carli 2007](#); [Eagly and Karau 2002](#); [Koenig et al. 2011](#)

expectations of their gender.⁵⁹ That concern has caused women candidates to adopt more gender-aligned strategies that reassure voters, and even tout the benefits of their stereotypically feminine credentials.⁶⁰ Still, women running primarily “as women” may find voters questioning whether those credentials translate to candidacy and officeholding.⁶¹ Taken together, these findings have pressured women candidates to do it all – to navigate what has been deemed a “double bind” where they must simultaneously prove credentials of candidacy and gender.⁶²

Stereotypical expectations of and effects for women candidates vary by party, and by whether those expectations apply to perceived candidate traits or issue expertise.⁶³ Scholarship has also emphasized that both men and women benefit electorally by adopting more complex, and less stereotypically-dependent, strategies for navigating the gendered terrain of political campaigns.⁶⁴ And the relationship between voter demands and candidate strategy is not uni-directional; candidates and their teams have as much capacity to disrupt voter expectations as they do to adapt to them.⁶⁵ Progress on this front is demonstrated by research showing that women can benefit from presenting themselves as multi-faceted, “360-degree” candidates.⁶⁶ Included among the many credentials women highlight are those rooted in their experiences and perspectives *as women*, and more specifically as women with multi-layered identities of race/ethnicity, class, age, and more.

How Women (and Men) Ran in 2018

Hillary Clinton famously and frequently insisted, in her 2008 bid for the presidency, that she was “not running as a woman,” spending very little time discussing the distinct female perspective that she would bring to the Oval Office. Clinton altered her approach in 2016, telling voters, “I’m not asking people to vote for me simply because I’m a woman. I’m asking people to vote for me on the merits. I think one of the merits is I am a woman.” Democratic women candidates in 2018 seemed to follow her lead. An evaluation of congressional campaign websites in 2018 found that Democratic women, and particularly more amateur Democratic women, were more likely than other women and men to reference representation and/or diversity in their candidate biographies.⁶⁷ In other forms of campaign messaging, we also saw women in 2018 draw upon distinctly gendered experiences as an asset to their candidacy instead of a hurdle to overcome. In her introductory [ad](#), House candidate Amy McGrath (D-KY) talked about petitioning Congress to allow women in military combat roles, a rule change that helped to pave her own path to becoming a fighter pilot in the U.S. Marines. McGrath’s military service meets a stereotypically masculine qualification, but the context in which she presents that service reveals how being a woman has

⁵⁸ [Bauer 2017](#); [Dolan 2010](#); [Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a](#)

⁵⁹ [Bauer 2017](#); [Bauer and Carpinella 2018](#); [Cassese and Holman 2018](#); [Krupnikov and Bauer 2014](#)

⁶⁰ [Dolan and Lynch 2017](#); [Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003](#); [Iyengar et al. 1997](#); [Kahn 1996](#); [Larson 2001](#); [Schneider 2014](#)

⁶¹ [Dolan 2005](#); [Gimenez et al. 2017](#)

⁶² [Jamieson 1995](#); see also [Carpinella and Bauer 2019](#)

⁶³ [Bauer 2019](#); [Cassese and Holman 2018](#); [Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009](#)

⁶⁴ [Banwart and McKinney 2005](#); [Banwart and Winfrey 2013](#); [Carpinella and Bauer 2019](#); [Cassese and Holman 2018](#)

⁶⁵ [Dittmar 2015](#)

⁶⁶ [Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2019](#)

⁶⁷ [McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2019](#)

heightened her sensitivity to – and understanding of – gender inequities in power. When Maryland gubernatorial candidate Krish Vignarajah unapologetically identified as a woman and a mother in her first campaign [ad](#), she offered those identities – and the distinct experiences that they afford her – as among the many merits on which she asked for voter support. While her ad – which featured her breastfeeding – sparked mixed reactions among women and men alike, it was one of the most overt examples of a woman candidate embracing her gender identity instead of downplaying its influence in candidate presentation, strategy, and messaging.

In addition to rethinking and revaluing credentials for political office, women and men candidates can also work to redefine the ways in which stereotypically masculine credentials – like strength or toughness – are conveyed. In a 2018 primary advertisement, U.S. House candidate Sol Flores’ (D-IL) described her own experience of combatting sexual abuse as evidence of the fighter she is and would be for the people of Illinois’ 4th congressional district. She communicated toughness, but not the kind demonstrated by a show of brute force. Flores was not the only woman candidate in 2018 to offer alternative measures of personal strength and resilience as illustrative of her capacity to lead. For example, a number of women candidates [shared their #MeToo stories](#) on the campaign trail as indicators of both their strength and their motivation to prevent the same abuse of other women.⁶⁸

Some women candidates in 2018 took an even more direct approach to challenging stereotypes and expectations that could otherwise impede their access to elected office. New York House candidate and now-Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D) opened her first [campaign advertisement](#) by saying, “Women who look like me are not supposed to run for office,” directly confronting perceptions of what is “normal” in congressional elections. Like Ocasio-Cortez, now-Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) defeated an incumbent from her own party en route to her electoral success in 2018. But her candidacy was not disruptive only in that way; Pressley drew from her experiences and perspectives as a Black woman to make her case to voters. She also challenged voters to check their own biases in evaluating her performance as a candidate. At an October 2018 rally to oppose Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation to the Supreme Court, Pressley took the podium and [said](#), “I’ll tell you the truth – as a woman of color who has a platform, I have been asked to not come off as outraged or angry for fear of being labeled as an angry Black woman.” She added, “Well, I am angry and I am outraged because this is outrageous.” In this moment, Pressley defined the bias that Black women confront, forcing her audience to recognize what might otherwise be accepted or implicit, and then proceeded to reject that bias as a constraint on her own behavior.

The 2018 electoral success of Ocasio-Cortez and Pressley, among other women adopting similar strategies, might serve as a rebuff to critics of “identity politics” in American elections. Scholars Sarah Allen Gershon, Celeste Montoya, Christina Bejarano, and Nadia Brown write, “While critics often misconstrue the politics of identity as fragmenting movements into vanishingly small constituencies, it in fact holds the promise of new avenues of cooperation.”⁶⁹ This and other research has not only emphasized the need to evaluate candidate strategies within distinct political contexts, but also to consider the influence of multi-layered identities in how women and men run and how they are received by myriad groups of voters.⁷⁰ The

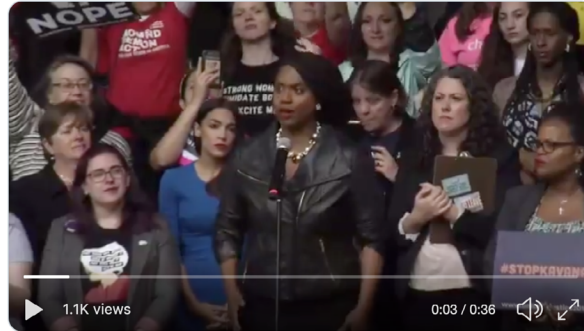
⁶⁸ [Seitz-Wald 2018](#); [Way 2018](#)

⁶⁹ [Gershon, Montoya, Bejarano, and Brown 2019](#), 3

⁷⁰ [Bejarano 2013](#); [Brown and Gershon 2016](#); [Carew 2016](#); [Cargile 2016](#); [Fraga et al. 2005](#); [Smooth 2006](#)



'I am outraged, because this is outrageous!': Ayanna Pressley, presumptive future congresswoman, gives impassioned speech at anti-Kavanaugh rally as Sen. Jeff Flake visits Boston trib.al/nlzkj63



11:21 AM · Oct 1, 2018 · SocialFlow

intersections of race and gender in candidate strategy remains an area of only limited research, but the findings that do exist reaffirm the danger of characterizing any set of campaign decisions as “running as a woman” or offering any single roadmap for women’s success.

In concluding their study on women’s campaign styles in 2018 contests, Maura McDonald, Rachel Porter, and Sarah Treul write, “Our research suggests that as the number of women running for office continues to grow, so too does [the range of] their presentational styles.” Importantly, they add, “The question remains though whether or not certain presentation styles are more successful.”⁷¹ More research is needed to determine when, where, and for which women candidates certain campaign styles and strategies are most successful. That research – and our evaluation of it – needs to grapple with both the intersectional realities confronted by women in different campaign environments and the multiple measures of success that we might apply. While the standard indicator for success in elections is winning (or coming unexpectedly close), making social – or institutional – change in political campaigns is also a form of winning. In the short term, disrupting expectations of both gender and candidacy on the campaign trail pushes voters to rethink what they value in our elected leaders and offers more than one path to victory for candidates. In the long term, challenging the masculine-dominated status quo in campaigning – and an even broader homogeneity in race, class, age, sexuality, and other candidate characteristics – expands the pool of potential candidates who will run and win.

The responsibility to redefine our ideals of political leadership should not and does not fall on women candidates alone. Men play a central role, especially as they continue to outnumber women as candidates for office, in reinforcing or rejecting the status quo in American elections. Research focused on masculinity in presidential politics demonstrates men’s influence most overtly, but male candidates across parties and levels of office regularly make strategic and tactical decisions that maintain or reject masculinity as the standard by which fitness for political office is measured.⁷²

⁷¹ McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2019, 32

⁷² Boatright and Sperling 2019; Conroy 2015; Dittmar 2015, 2018; Duerst-Lahti and Oakley 2018; Katz 2013, 2016

In 2018, male candidates offered diverse examples of disrupting or maintaining masculine norms. For example, in addition to featuring [guns and explosions](#) as overt symbols of power, Georgia gubernatorial candidate Brian Kemp's (R) advertisements adhered to norms of patriarchal masculinity. In [one ad](#), Kemp sits polishing his rifle while intimidating his daughter's suitor into laying out his platform for the governorship. In this ad, Kemp is the masculine protector who uses fear as tool by which to gain and wield power. In contrast, 2018 Maryland gubernatorial candidate Rich Madaleno (D) challenged heteronormative conceptions of masculinity in an [introductory video](#) which featured his husband and children and celebrated the normalcy of their family dynamics despite perceptions that they are apart from the norm. These examples are important reminders that while so much attention is paid to how women navigate their gender on the campaign trail, men play the gender card, too.

While there is no single indicator of the degree to which masculine dominance was disrupted in candidate strategies, the 2018 election offered a healthy dose of examples of individual candidates disrupting the idea that there is a singular model for running *as a woman*, or even as a man. This diversity in candidate strategy has potentially positive implications for expanding the pool of people willing to run and able to be successful as we move into our next election season.

Navigating Gendered Terrain in 2020

Already in the 2020 election season we have seen candidates – women and men – navigate the gendered terrain of a presidential campaign in ways distinct from elections past. Multiple women candidates have centered their gender identity in campaign messaging. For example, Kirsten Gillibrand's campaign announcement presented her first as a mom and then touted her record on women's rights. In that [video](#) and on the campaign trail, she emphasized an intersectional approach to feminism; she noted that "it is outrageous to ask women of color to bear the burdens of every single one of these fights over and over and over again" and educated audiences about what it means to have [White privilege](#). Kamala Harris had one of the most memorable moments in the first Democratic debate when she drew directly from her own experience as a young Black girl to challenge opponent Joe Biden's recent comments and previous policy positions. She [said](#), "Growing up, my sister and I had to deal with the neighbor who told us her parents said she couldn't play with us because...we were Black," and added that she was part of the second class to integrate her California school due to busing policies that, she argued, Biden had opposed.

Elizabeth Warren has repeated a ritual she began in her first bid for the U.S. Senate in 2012. When meeting young girls, she makes them "pinky promise" that they will remember that she is running for office "because that's what girls do." Similarly, Amy Klobuchar repeats "[may the best woman win](#)" on the campaign trail. In these and other ways, both minor and significant, the women running in 2020 are contributing to the normalization of women's presidential leadership.



There was a little girl in California who was bussed to school. That little girl was me. [#DemDebate](#)



10:11 PM · Jun 27, 2019 · [Twitter Web Client](#)



Whenever I meet a little girl, I tell them "I'm running for president because that's what girls do." Then we pinky promise that they'll remember. I want every girl to know that when they fight from the heart, they can win. [#WomensEqualityDay](#)



1:17 PM · Aug 26, 2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)

Men competing for the Democratic nomination for president are also confronting and traversing differently gendered terrain in the 2020 presidential race. In the campaign's earliest days, multiple men were asked about their commitment to a presidential ticket with gender parity, leading some to [state clearly their prioritization of gender equity](#) and [others to fumble](#) in responding to a question so rarely asked in previous presidential candidates. Joe Biden was pressed early on to respond to allegations that he has made women uncomfortable when invading their personal space; after nearly five decades in politics where Biden's hands-on approach has been [well-documented](#), he has been pushed to consider the ways in which being a White man with power might have made women reluctant to express discomfort, regardless of his benign intent. Beto O'Rourke offered an example of a stumble and recovery for a male candidate running in an environment where traditional gender norms are being questioned. When [he told an audience](#) in his first campaign event after declaring candidacy that his wife Amy was "raising, sometimes with my help," their three children, he faced immediate backlash. The next day, he apologized for making a joke about the disparate responsibilities in his household, noting that he should have used the moment to acknowledge the frequency with which women still bear the primary burden for caregiving in American families. He added, "I hope as I have been in some instances part of the problem, I can also be part of the solution."

Men running in 2020 have not only had to respond to questions around gender equity, but have also been more proactive in integrating gender considerations into their agendas and orientations to politics and policy. For example, the first line of Julian Castro's policy page quotes Black feminist Audre Lorde, and his policy proposals go on to include plans to address the gender wage gap and underpaid care work. Castro also [made news](#) when he asked an activist for their preferred pronouns at a campaign event, marking his awareness of and respect for non-binary individuals and communities.



Other male candidates have proactively touted their plans to address gender inequities as integral to – not niched within – their policy platforms. Former Democratic candidate Jay Inslee was probably most overt in noting, as Gillibrand had, his own privilege as a White man and his responsibility to understand and address gender and racial inequities. In the second Democratic debate, when asked why he would be the best candidate to heal the racial divide in the country, Inslee [responded](#), “I approach this question with humility because I have not experienced what many Americans have. I’ve never been a black teenager pulled over in a White neighborhood. I’ve never been a woman talked over in a meeting. I’ve never been an LGBTQ member subject to a slur.” He went on, “And so I have believed I have an added responsibility, a double responsibility, to deal with racial disparity.”

In 2020, White male candidates have – perhaps for the first time – been asked to address their privilege as a potential liability for their presidential bids instead of assuming that their race and gender identities provide only electoral advantages. As they craft their strategic responses, presidential ground continues to shift in ways that disrupt the dominance of masculinity and Whiteness.

DURABILITY OR DESTRUCTION OF GENDER & INTERSECTIONAL BARRIERS

While women won elected office at record levels in November 2018, two-thirds of Americans told Pew Research Center in June 2018 that it is easier for men than women to get elected to high political offices.⁷³ Young Americans – aged 18-34 – were the most likely to identify a male advantage in elections, implying that the perceived challenges to women running for office are persistent across generations. These data are also consistent with findings within the past decade, including a 2014 study that found that three-quarters of respondents agree both that women still face discrimination in public life and that people hesitate to vote for women candidates.⁷⁴ But does perception match reality? And did the 2018 election offer any evidence of either the durability or the destruction of gender and/or intersectional barriers to women's electoral success? What does this mean for 2020 and beyond?

In the following section, we explain that:

The success of women in the 2018 elections did not fully upend the entrenched institutional norms and structures that have put women at an electoral disadvantage in the United States.

- Gender and intersectional biases persist in evaluations of women candidates, with implications for voters' perceptions of candidate competency and capacity to serve.
- Prevailing biases mean that women running for office must continue to do additional work to achieve the same results as White men.
- The party and financial support infrastructures for women vary for Democrats and Republicans, as well as between White women and women of color.
- Women continue to face harassment and threats of violence, particularly those of a sexual nature, as a cost of candidacy.
- Gender biases persist in media coverage and commentary of U.S. campaigns, but the backlash to biased coverage has gained in volume, visibility, and influence over time. Still, mainstream coverage and commentary on political campaigns remain dominated by White men.

There are key points of progress evident prior to, during, and as a result of the 2018 election that are worth celebrating as we look ahead to the next election.

- Among Democrats, heightened voter support and enthusiasm for women candidates aligned with women winning their races at higher rates than men at nearly every level and phase of the 2018 elections. Similar levels of enthusiasm for women candidates are evident in 2020 election polls of Democratic voters.

⁷³ [Horowitz, Igielnik, and Parker 2018](#)

⁷⁴ [Dolan and Hansen 2018](#)

- While sexism in the electorate contributed to President Trump’s success, research indicates that anti-sexist sentiment among voters hurt some Republican candidates in 2018.
- Many women candidates refused to wait to run for office in 2018. They pushed back against party norms and did not wait to be asked to run. They also challenged historical hurdles confronting young women and mothers of young children. Multiple women running in 2018 and 2020 pushed for state and federal campaign finance rules to permit the use of campaign funds for childcare.
- An historic number of women are running for president in 2020, capitalizing on the success of women in 2018 and continuing to challenge electoral norms and institutions that have advantaged White men.

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN CANDIDATES

Public support for women’s political representation has grown steadily over time, as [Gallup](#) shows in their polling; from 1975 to 2014, for example, the percent of Americans saying the country would be better governed with more women in elective office nearly doubled from 33% to 63%. In response to the same question in June 2018, 67% of registered voters told [NBC/Wall Street Journal](#) that the U.S. would be better off with more women in politics. In the [same poll](#), one in four voters, including one in three women, said that they were especially “enthusiastic” about women candidates in 2018. Finally, 61% of Americans told [Pew Research Center](#) that it was a good thing that more women were running for office in 2018 than in the past.⁷⁵

After decades of conducting her own research on gender and politics, Kathleen Dolan [wrote](#) in 2018, “Although the longstanding conventional wisdom has been that the fortunes of women candidates were hampered by public hostility to their candidacies and gendered stereotypes about their abilities, the public is now uniformly supportive of women’s place in politics.” But research from Dolan and others notes significant differences in support for women candidates – at least when asked in general terms – by respondent party and gender. Democrats are more likely to express a desire for greater gender balance in government than Republicans, and women are more supportive of gender parity among those in their respective parties, according to both academic studies and public opinion polls.⁷⁶ Dolan and Michael Hansen find that those individuals who are more likely to blame systems versus blaming women for women’s underrepresentation – more women than men and more Democrats than Republicans – are also those more likely to want more women in office.⁷⁷ Relatedly, research from Kira Sanbonmatsu on public desire to see more women in office – conducted in 2003 and again in 2018 – shows that those individuals who overestimate women’s level of congressional representation are less interested in seeing more women in Congress; those individuals are more likely to be Republican and male.⁷⁸

But do these perceptions of gender disparity and its causes influence vote choice? Dolan and Hansen find little effect of blame attribution attitudes on voter behavior, at least in general election contests.

⁷⁵ There are notable partisan differences in these perceptions, perhaps due to the fact that the majority of women candidates and officeholders at the time of the survey were Democrats; about 80% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents told Pew that it was a good thing that more women were running in 2018, compared to 39% of Republicans and Republican leaners. Another 2017 survey from [PerryUndem](#) found that 50% of those surveyed believed the country would be better off with more women in office.

⁷⁶ [Dolan and Sanbonmatsu 2009](#); [Dolan 2014a](#); Sanbonmatsu 2019

⁷⁷ [Dolan and Hansen 2018](#)

⁷⁸ Sanbonmatsu 2019

Similarly, support for increasing gender parity generally is not the same as a gender preference in vote choice.⁷⁹ For example, in PRRI's 2018 poll, 60% of Americans see a benefit of greater gender balance in government, while just 17% say that they would prefer a woman candidate to a man. Notably, however, a smaller proportion of voters (11%) said they would prefer a man in the same poll.

Most research measuring support for women candidates does little to distinguish among women, especially in terms of race and ethnicity, which limits our knowledge about support for increasing representation for women of specific racial and ethnic groups. However, Kira Sanbonmatsu's recent research offers evidence that support for women's representation is conditional on race. Drawing upon data from the post-election survey 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), she finds the public is slightly less likely to report that they support electing more "women of color" to Congress than to say that they would like to see more "women" in Congress. Those individuals most likely to vary in support by officeholder race were less educated, White, and more likely to identify as Republicans.⁸⁰

Research on minority linked fate, which Evelyn Simien defines as "an acute sense of awareness (or recognition) that what happens to the group will also affect the individual member,"⁸¹ also offers some insights into the influence of racial identity on candidate preference, but scholars of intersectionality and Black feminism have noted the distinct ways in which linked fate manifests itself among Black women and men.⁸² In a recent study applying an intersectional lens to minority linked fate among Blacks and Latinas/os, Sarah Allen Gershon, Celeste Montoya, Christina Bejarano, and Nadia Brown found similar levels of linked fate among Black and Latina/o men and women, but differences in the degree to which those attitudes informed perceptions of candidates' ability to represent respondents' interests; for example, they found some of the highest levels of minority linked fate among Black women, but these feelings were less influential in Black women's perceptions of candidates' representational promise than they were in perceptions by other race/gender groups.⁸³ Another study found that shared ethnoracial and gender identity was predictive of support for Black women candidates from Black women voters, but had no significant effect among White women and Latinas.⁸⁴ This research reinforces the importance of curbing assumptions that shared identity (whether racial, gender, or both) predicts support for political candidates, especially when certain identities – such as race over gender for White women – grant groups greater privilege.⁸⁵

As we look to 2020, one recent national survey indicates that Democratic voters actually *prefer* a woman over a man and a person of color over a White candidate in the presidential election.⁸⁶ Importantly, however, these assessments were done between pairs of otherwise identical and hypothetical presidential candidates, not the Democratic candidates currently running for their party's nomination. Beyond their preference, though, voters' enthusiasm for candidates might also be boosted with a woman on the ballot. A [June 2019](#)

⁷⁹ For exception, see [Paolino's \(1995\)](#) findings on the significant influence of women's attitudes toward power disparities by gender in government, business, and industry on their vote choice for women in U.S. Senate contests.

⁸⁰ Sanbonmatsu 2019

⁸¹ [Simien 2005, 529](#); See also [Dawson 1994](#) for origins of this concept.

⁸² [Gay and Tate 1998](#); [Gershon, Montoya, Bejarano, and Brown 2019](#); [Simien 2005](#)

⁸³ [Gershon, Montoya, Bejarano, and Brown 2019](#)

⁸⁴ [Gershon and Monforti 2019](#); [Philpot and Walton \(2007\)](#) also find that Black women voters are the strongest supporters of Black women candidates.

⁸⁵ See [Campi and Junn 2019](#)

⁸⁶ [Magni and Reynolds 2019](#)

[AP-NORC poll](#) found that 40% of registered Democratic voters said that a woman presidential candidate would make them more excited to vote for that candidate, while only 10% said the same about a man. That excitement for a woman candidate is especially high among women, more liberal, and younger Democrats.

When voters were asked in an [August 2019 The Economist/YouGov poll](#) about the ideal number of women in elected offices generally, nearly two-thirds said that either parity or having more women than men would be best (with 30% of voters not sure); 81% of Democrats and 52% of Republicans preferred 50% or more women in elected offices. The same poll pointed to some particular advantages for women candidates as we head into election 2020. About one-quarter of voters reported that elected women are better than men at maintaining a tone of civility and respect, working out compromises, creating safe and respectful workplaces, serving as role models for children, and being honest and ethical. A plurality of voters also believe elected women are more compassionate and empathetic than men. There remain areas where men are perceived as better-suited to lead, such as on national security or defense, but these [data](#) indicate that support for women candidates is not simply rooted in a desire for parity, but also in perceptions that women bring particular assets to political leadership and officeholding.

GENDER AS AN ELECTORAL ASSET

Electoral Success

The enthusiasm surrounding women's candidacies in 2018 and 2020, especially among Democrats and women, indicates that gender need not only be considered a hurdle for women candidates in elections; it can also serve as an electoral asset. A blunt measure of women's potential political advantage in 2018 is their rate of winning compared to similarly-situated men. Non-incumbent women outperformed men across levels of office in both primary and general election contests. Democratic women fared best, especially in the general election, and were responsible for the majority of House, Senate, gubernatorial, and statewide executive seats that flipped from red to blue in 2018 elections.

While Republican women fared better in their primaries than men, they made up a much smaller proportion of candidates overall and within their party. And unlike the Democratic women who gained seats for their party, Republican women saw net losses at nearly every level of office as a result of election 2018. Recently published research from Danielle Thomsen looks at these partisan trends in U.S. House primary and general election results over time (1980-2012), finding, "Republican women face a much more difficult electoral context than Democratic women: they are less likely to be incumbents, they have more primary competition, and they run in less favorable partisan environments."⁸⁷ This aligns with previous research from Barbara Palmer and Dennis Simon on the characteristics of "women-friendly" congressional districts (1970-2000), wherein they found that districts most friendly to Republican women in general

⁸⁷ [Thomsen 2019, 423](#)

Primary and General Election Win Rates for Non-Incumbent Candidates, by Gender, Party, and Level of Office

2018

Primary Election

	U.S. House	U.S. Senate	Governor	Other Statewide Elected Executive Office
All Women	40.8%	25%	21.4%	55.8%
All Men	24.5%	15.9%	18.8%	43.9%
Democratic Women	43.3%	20%	26.3%	63.2%
Democratic Men	20.6%	13.7%	18.8%	47.9%
Republican Women	33.3%	30%	11.1%	44.1%
Republican Men	28.8%	16.8%	18.8%	40.7%

General Election

	U.S. House	U.S. Senate	Governor	Other Statewide Elected Executive Office
All Women	22.2%	30%	41.7%	38.4%
All Men	20%	17.2%	35.7%	33.3%
Democratic Women	27.6%	50%	40%	36.7%
Democratic Men	21.3%	0%	33.3%	28.8%
Republican Women	2.9%	16.7%	50%	40%
Republican Men	19%	22.7%	38.1%	37.1%

elections were least friendly to Republican women in primaries.⁸⁸ Together, these findings illuminate the very different electoral terrain that Democratic and Republican women navigate.

Women candidates' experiences and outcomes also differ by race. A review of women candidates' general election win rates at the state legislative level from 2012 to 2014 found that women of color fared better than their White women counterparts in both competitive and non-competitive seats, despite emerging as nominees less often than White women in majority-White districts.⁸⁹

In 2018 U.S. House contests, 5 of 13 (38.5%) women of color elected for the first time won in majority-White districts, demonstrating their capacity for success outside of the majority-minority districts in which their congressional representation has been most concentrated.⁹⁰

Non-incumbent Democratic women of color won at higher rates than Democratic White women candidates in general election contests, but not in primary elections. Non-incumbent Republican women of color candidates (who were much smaller in number) fared slightly better than White Republican women in primary contests, but no new Republican women of color were elected to Congress in 2018. In addition, the only Black Republican woman ever elected to the U.S. House – Mia Love (R-UT) – was defeated by a Democrat in election 2018.

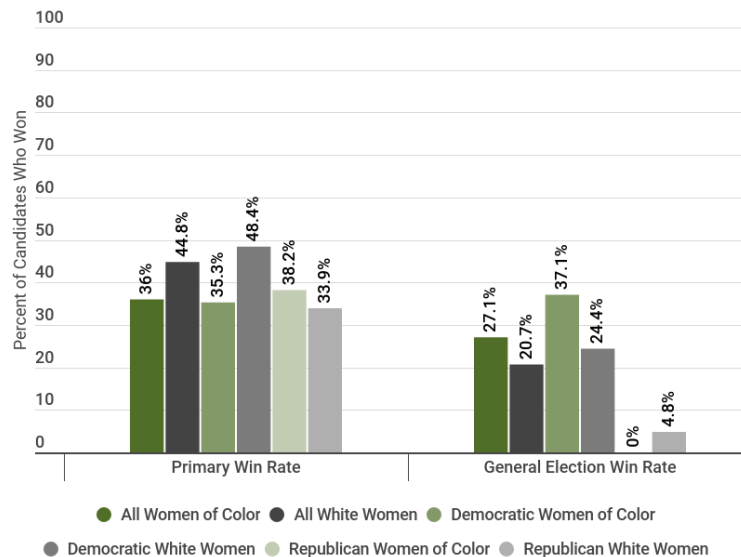
⁸⁸ [Palmer and Simon 2008](#), 211; [Palmer and Simon \(2008\)](#) also find that congressional districts favoring Democratic white women from 1970-2000 were more urban, more educated, more diverse, more liberal, and wealthier than those favoring men. Black congresswomen, similar to Black congressmen, were more likely to represent very liberal, more compact, poorer, more urban districts with larger minority populations. Republican women fared better in less conservative, more urban, and more diverse congressional districts than did Republican men. In a more recent evaluation of "women-friendly districts," [Simon and Palmer \(2016\)](#) find that women have been more likely to hold U.S. House seats (1972-2014) in more urban, more educated, and more diverse districts than men.

⁸⁹ [Shah, Scott, and Juenke 2019](#)

⁹⁰ Nearly 8 in 10 women of color serving in the 116th Congress represent majority-minority districts.

Women U.S. House Non-Incumbent Candidate Win Rates, by Race and Party

2018



Women of color were also highly underrepresented in the candidate pool for the U.S. Senate. And of the 11 (8D, 3R) non-incumbent women of color who ran for the U.S. Senate, none made it through to the general election.

Isolating a distinct gender or intersectional advantage (or disadvantage) in vote choice to women candidates is difficult, especially in general election contests where party is the primary predictor of voter behavior. Though more rigorous tests of what contributed to candidate success in 2018 congressional elections are needed, these raw data show that, especially among Democratic women, women appeared unencumbered by explicit gender bias at the ballot box.

Mobilization and Inspiration

The potential advantages of more women on the ballot are not limited to electoral victory. Previous research finds that the presence of women candidates can enhance women's political engagement in the electorate.⁹¹ Women voters *did turn out* at higher rates than men in 2018, as they have in every election since 1980, and they also increased their turnout from 2014 to 2018 by a slightly higher amount than men. These data do not prove that women's presence as candidates increased women's turnout – in fact, the same factors that increased women's candidacies may have also enhanced their likelihood of voting, but some [polling](#) on the heightened enthusiasm of women voters about women candidates indicates the potentially beneficial effect on voter engagement of having more women on the ballot in 2018. Even more, the symbolic effects of seeing more women running for and winning elected office could be lasting, according to research that shows the benefits of exposing young people to political women.⁹²

⁹¹ [Atkeson 2003](#); [Reingold and Harrell 2010](#); see also [Ondercin and Fulton \(2019\)](#), who find that individual voters are more likely to turn out in contests with women candidates, especially Democratic women candidates, but argue that the causal mechanism for this heightened engagement is less motivation and more the reduced information costs of voting when gender acts as an effective cue for voter decision-making.

⁹² [Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006](#); [Wolbrecht and Campbell 2017](#)

Disruption

The benefits of being a woman candidate are not only evident in the numbers. Women candidates are also embracing gender as an electoral asset in how they make their case to voters. Already, 2020 women candidates are adopting strategies that leverage their gender identities and experiences to distinguish them from their opponents. In addition to the examples noted above for women presidential contenders, early ads from women congressional candidates like Nancy Mace (R-SC) and Kim Olson (D-TX) are illustrative. In what promises to be a competitive contest in South Carolina's first congressional district, State Representative Nancy Mace [introduces](#) herself as the first woman to graduate from The Citadel and promises a "new voice" in Washington, DC. Democrat Kim Olson also touts her history of blazing trails for women in the Air Force in her first campaign [ad](#), as well as her work to address sexual misconduct in the military and to support women veterans, as preparing her for the "battle" she will face to make change as the representative from Texas' 24th congressional district. While much attention has been paid to the benefits for women veterans in proving their toughness for elected office, these women have also demonstrated how their distinct experiences as *women* veterans have prepared them to disrupt male and masculine-dominated political institutions.

GENDER AND INTERSECTIONAL EFFECTS ON CANDIDATE EVALUATION

Stereotypes

An extensive literature illuminates the congruity between expectations for officeholders and the traits and expertise most associated with men.⁹³ As Alice Eagly and Steven Karau write, "In thinking about female leaders, people would combine their largely divergent expectations about leaders and women, whereas in thinking about male leaders, people would combine highly redundant expectations."⁹⁴ This is especially true in perceptions of executive political offices, which are most aligned with masculinity.⁹⁵

Some research in the past decade has suggested that the divergence between voter perceptions of women and their expectations of political leadership has lessened,⁹⁶ but gender stereotypes continue to shape voter expectations and evaluations of candidates.⁹⁷ For example, a [Georgetown analysis](#) of General Social Survey data shows that the proportion of Americans viewing men as better emotionally suited for politics than women has declined from nearly 50% in 1975 to 13% in 2018, but that bias has not fully subsided.⁹⁸ As Cecilia Mo finds, gender attitudes have "grown subtler," but "remain consequential" in the electoral process.⁹⁹

The exact consequences of stereotypical beliefs in electoral politics are debated, as Kathleen Dolan finds "no evidence of any direct, consistent, or substantial impact" of gender stereotypes on evaluations of, or

⁹³ Eagly and Carli 2007; Eagly and Karau 2002; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2011; Koenig et al. 2011

⁹⁴ Eagly and Karau 2002, 575

⁹⁵ Conroy 2015; Dittmar 2015, 2018; Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995; Duerst-Lahti and Oakley 2018; Fox and Oxley 2003; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; 1993b; Katz 2013, 2016; Lawless 2004; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989; Thomas and Wilcox 1998

⁹⁶ Brooks 2013; Cormack and Karl 2018; Dolan 2010; Fridkin and Kenney 2009; Hayes and Lawless 2016; Parker, Horowitz, and Rohal 2015; see also Andersen and Ditonto (2018), who find some evidence that gender could serve as a "net benefit for women candidates" in voter evaluations (390).

⁹⁷ Banwart 2010; Ditonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk 2014; Schneider and Bos 2014; Mo 2015; Parker, Horowitz, and Rohal 2015; Ditonto 2017; Horowitz, Igielnik, and Parker 2018

⁹⁸ Carnevale, Smith, and Campbell 2019

⁹⁹ Mo 2015, 357

voting for, women candidates.¹⁰⁰ She concludes, along with others, that partisanship overwhelms gender in real-world campaigns, even if gendered attitudes among voters persist.¹⁰¹ But consequences of stereotypical beliefs are not only manifested at the ballot box. Bias in perceptions of gender and/or candidacy influences how voters evaluate candidates throughout the campaign process as well as the work that campaigns do to ensure that gender is not a detriment on Election Day. For example, some research shows that voters continue to seek out more information about women candidates' competence and qualifications, placing an additional burden on women to prove themselves as capable.¹⁰² Women candidates are also vulnerable to harsher punishment for perceived incivility or scandal, increasing the pressure on them to be better than men while also creating opportunities for opponents' attacks to have greater impact.¹⁰³

The dearth of intersectional research persists in literature that evaluates the role of gender stereotypes in candidate evaluation. As Sarah Allen Gershon and Jessica Lavariega Monforti write, existing scholarship on gender and racial stereotypes of candidates "overwhelmingly focuses on only female or on one racial group," adding, "There is a limited amount of work that focuses on co-racial candidates and voters."¹⁰⁴ This research gap stunts our understanding of how these dynamics affect Black, Latina, Native, Asian, and multiracial women candidates. It also makes it difficult to test prevailing theories about how women of color fare in electoral politics. Some previous research has emphasized the "double disadvantage" or "multiple marginality" that women of color confront as candidates,¹⁰⁵ but more recent studies have described distinct advantages that may accrue to minority women candidates.¹⁰⁶

Evidence reveals that women of color experience both advantages and disadvantages. The intersectional effects of gender and race on candidate evaluation and vote choice vary, both within and between groups.¹⁰⁷ Among Latinas specifically, some research shows the potential for an electoral "Latina advantage" against Latino and White male candidates, while other findings indicate Latinas are rated lower than their potential male and female opponents on perceived experience, competency, intelligence, and strong leadership.¹⁰⁸ In other studies, Latina candidates faced a disadvantage even on stereotypically feminine traits like compassion and warmth compared to their Latino male counterparts.¹⁰⁹

The limited research on evaluations of Black women candidates has also found variation in ratings of perceived issue competencies, with Black women viewed as less competent than opponents on the economy and security, for example, and more competent than opponents on welfare or civil rights.¹¹⁰ Investigating the potentially detrimental effects of the "angry Black woman" trope, one recent study finds some negative effects on evaluations of and likely votes for Black women candidates portrayed as particularly assertive.¹¹¹ Research on Black women candidates has also identified distinct experiences and evaluations confronting

¹⁰⁰ [Dolan 2014b](#), 104

¹⁰¹ [Dolan 2014b](#); Hayes 2011

¹⁰² [Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2012](#); [Ditonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk 2014](#); [Ditonto 2017](#)

¹⁰³ [Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2019](#); [Dittmar 2015](#); [Mo 2019](#); see also [Madsen \(2019\)](#) finding that women candidates face greater penalty than men if they appear untrustworthy.

¹⁰⁴ [Gershon and Monforti 2019](#), 2; For exceptions, [Brown and Gershon 2016](#); [Carey and Lizotte 2017](#); [Gershon 2013](#); [Sigelman and Sigelman 1982](#)

¹⁰⁵ [Gay and Tate 1998](#); [Hancock 2007](#)

¹⁰⁶ [Bejarano 2013](#); [Carew 2016](#); [Cargile 2016](#); [Gordon and Miller 2005](#); [Philpot and Walton 2007](#)

¹⁰⁷ [Gershon and Monforti 2019](#)

¹⁰⁸ [Bejarano 2013](#); [Gershon and Monforti 2019](#); [Monforti and Gershon 2016](#)

¹⁰⁹ [Cargile, Merolla, and Schroedel 2016](#)

¹¹⁰ [Carew 2012](#); [Gordon and Miller 2015](#)

¹¹¹ [Hicks 2019](#)

Black women of different skin tones and hair texture, further demonstrating the need for more intersectional and nuanced examinations of voter bias.¹¹² Attention to the distinct electoral terrain to be traversed by women with different racial and ethnic identities is especially crucial as the number of women of color candidates increases and we watch two women of color compete for the presidency in 2020.

Sexism

The consequences of sexism were real in the 2016 election. Multiple studies found that sexist attitudes were among the significant predictors of voting for President Donald Trump in both the primary and general election.¹¹³ While sexism did not predict vote choice at the congressional level in 2016, findings from the 2018 midterms show that anti-sexist beliefs were especially influential in casting ballots for U.S. House candidates. Republican House candidates “paid a price for their party’s sexism in 2018,” according to Brian Schaffner, losing support among voters with the least sexist attitudes.¹¹⁴

In recent research, Tessa Dito finds that participants in an experiment who hold more sexist beliefs are less likely to search for information about women candidates and less likely to rate them positively or vote for them, even when their policy preferences most closely align with the woman candidate.¹¹⁵ This raises an important question, however, about just how much of the population holds high levels of sexist beliefs. Using average scores from a hostile sexism scale included on a 2018 nationally representative survey, Brian Schaffner notes that about 7% of Americans can be characterized as very sexist (consistently high levels of agreement with sexist statements), 14% of Americans can be characterized as non-sexist (consistently low levels of agreement with sexist statements), and the remainder of Americans fall somewhere in between. These data indicate that while the most negative effects of sexist beliefs may be concentrated among a small portion of the electorate, they are not inconsequential.

While Schaffner does not find an interaction between sexist attitudes and candidate gender in predicting vote choice in 2018, he and Samantha Luks do find that likely 2020 Democratic primary voters reporting higher levels of sexism were less likely to report women candidates as their top choice for the presidential nomination in the fall of 2018.¹¹⁶ Though sexist attitudes might not directly depress support for women candidates when party differences are at play, these findings suggest the potential influence of sexist attitudes when candidate party is held constant and prove that neither party is immune from sexism’s effects. Women running in the 2020 presidential primary will have to clear this additional hurdle in their path to the Democratic nomination.

¹¹² [Brown 2014](#); [Carew 2012, 2016](#); [Lemi and Brown 2019](#)

¹¹³ [Bock, Byrd-Craven and Burkley 2017](#); [Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle 2019](#); [Casesse and Barnes 2018](#); [Casese and Holman 2019](#); [Frasure-Yokley 2018](#); [Knuckey 2019](#); [Ratliff et al. 2019](#); [Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta 2018](#); [Setzler and Yanus 2018](#); [Valentino, Wayne, Icenso 2018](#); for contrast, see Rhodes et al. (2019) for evidence of a slight drop in Trump’s favorability after the release of the *Access Hollywood* tape.

¹¹⁴ [Schaffner 2019](#); In a separate study, [Luks and Schaffner \(2019a\)](#) find that the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh seemed to have a rallying effect among voters with the most sexist attitudes, increasing their support of Republicans in Congress ahead of the 2018 election. While those with the least sexist attitudes dropped in their levels of political efficacy after the Kavanaugh confirmation, they did not report a lower likelihood of voting.

¹¹⁵ [Ditonto 2019](#)

¹¹⁶ [Schaffner 2019](#); [Luks and Schaffner 2019b](#)

DOING MORE WORK

Research shows that “gender neutral” outcomes at the ballot box are not the result of gender neutrality in campaigns. Instead, gender shapes who runs, how they run, and how voters respond to them. For women, waging a campaign for elected office often entails doing additional work to ensure that gender bias does not impede their electoral success.¹¹⁷ It has also meant being better than their male counterparts. Multiple studies have shown that women candidates are, on average, of higher quality, than their male peers, and that this “gendered quality gap” helps to explain gender parity in election results.¹¹⁸ In an analysis of U.S. House candidates in the decade before the 2018 election, Sarah Fulton and Kostanca Dhima find that Democratic women candidates’ quality advantage over their male counterparts explains their equal (or greater) support among voters. They describe this “performance premium” placed on women candidates as a persistent, and too easily overlooked, cost of running for women candidates.¹¹⁹ Other research has confirmed that women who compete against men of equal quality might face an electoral disadvantage due to the persistence of this premium.¹²⁰

Some evidence from 2018 contests show that women candidates continued to compete with a quality advantage. In an analysis of Democratic primary candidates for U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and governor, Meredith Conroy, Mai Nguyen, and Nathaniel Rakich found women candidates, especially those running for governor or senator, were more likely than men to have previous experience as elected officials.¹²¹ Reporting their findings for *FiveThirtyEight*, they noted that – as of August 2018 – 56% of Democratic women gubernatorial candidates had previous elected office experience, compared to 37% of men running for governor. Among Democratic candidates for the U.S. Senate, they found a 58 percentage-point gap between men and women who had experience in elected office; 80% of Democratic women versus 22% of Democratic men running for the U.S. Senate previously held elected office.¹²² Without discounting the influence of this experience advantage on women candidates’ primary success, they find that Democratic women outperformed their male counterparts *even when* accounting for previous experience.

Previous research has found another way that the work required of women candidates to win primary elections is greater than that required of men: women draw more challengers at the primary stage, placing an additional hurdle in their path to nomination and electoral success.¹²³ In demonstrating that women faced greater primary competition in U.S. House elections from 1958-2004, Jennifer Lawless and Kathryn Pearson conclude that women have “to be better than men to fare equally well.”¹²⁴

While Republican and Democratic women – incumbents and non-incumbents – won at higher rates than their male counterparts in U.S. House primaries in 2018, some did face opposition that was related to

¹¹⁷ [Dittmar 2015](#); see also [Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2018](#)

¹¹⁸ [Fulton 2012, 2014](#); [Milyo and Schosberg 2000](#); [Pearson and McGhee 2013](#); Candidate quality can be measured in many ways. While some studies use more simplistic measures based on previous experience in elective office, Fulton relies on detailed ratings of candidates (by district observers) on items like personal integrity, dedication to public service, grasp of the issues, ability to find solutions to problems, ability to work with political leaders, public speaking ability, ability to stay in touch with the district, ability to provide constituency service, ability to bring federal funds to the district, and legislative accomplishments.

¹¹⁹ Fulton and Dhima 2019, 4

¹²⁰ [Barnes, Branton, and Cassese 2017](#); [Branton et al., 2018](#); see also [Carey and Lizotte 2017](#)

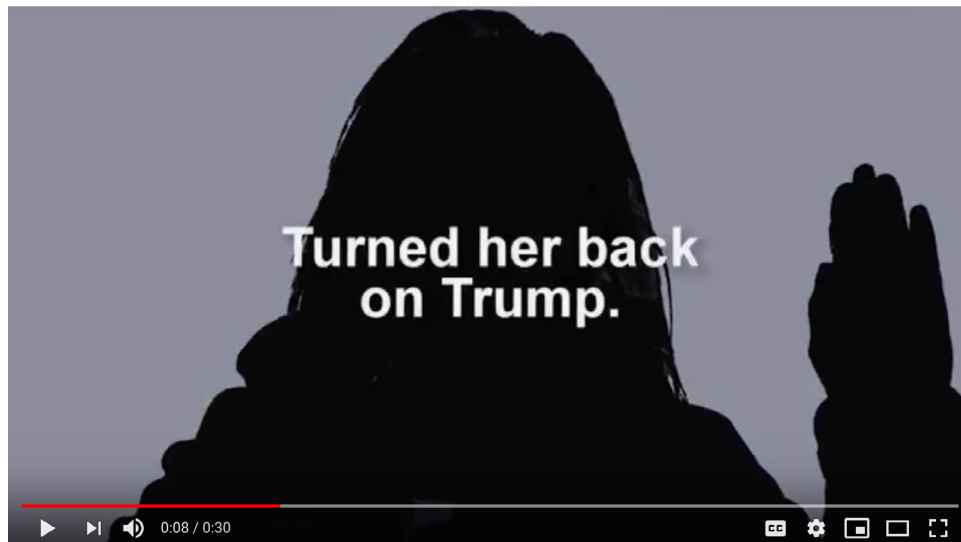
¹²¹ [Conroy, Nguyen, and Rakich 2018](#)

¹²² [Conroy, Nguyen, and Rakich 2018](#)

¹²³ [Shah, Scott, and Juenger \(2019\)](#) find that women of color candidates at the state legislative level actually face the *least* number of challengers at the *general election* stage, suggesting that more research on primary competition should evaluate potential differences by women candidates’ race and ethnicity.

¹²⁴ [Lawless and Pearson 2008](#), 78; see also [Thomsen \(2019\)](#) on primary challengers to Republican women candidates.

gender. In Alabama's 2nd Congressional District, incumbent Representative Martha Roby (R) faced four primary opponents and was forced into a runoff election to secure the Republican nomination. Roby's primary opponents tried to paint her as disloyal to President Trump, pointing out her [call](#) for Trump to leave the presidential race after the release of the *Access Hollywood* tape in which he joked about sexually assaulting women. In a May 2018 attack [ad](#) against Roby, run-off opponent Bobby Bright claimed, "Roby turned her back on the president when he needed her most." While she survived the challenge and went on to win re-election, Roby – one of the youngest Republican women in Congress – has already [announced](#) that she will not be running for re-election in 2020.



In a primary campaign ad attacking incumbent Representative Martha Roby (R-AL02), candidate Bobby Bright claimed Roby turned her back on candidate Trump when she called for him to leave the presidential race after the release of the Access Hollywood tape.

When CAWP scholars [interviewed](#) 83 women in the 114th Congress, we heard repeatedly that the challenges of campaigning for and winning office were greater than the challenges they faced once in office.¹²⁵ While congresswomen noted that they continue to be held to higher standards than their male counterparts after being elected, their emphasis on the heightened hurdles on the campaign trail reinforces research findings that women candidates face – but also overcome – greater scrutiny than men en route to electoral success. That scrutiny is not limited to their capacity to do the job, but also their capacity to win. Especially for women campaigning to be the first in an elected office, they must run two campaigns at once. In addition to convincing voters that they are the best person for the job, they must allocate time, energy, and resources to combat skepticism that voters will back someone who does not fit the White male norm.

Already, women presidential candidates in 2020 have been asked to prove that their electoral success is possible, especially after Hillary Clinton's 2016 defeat. Elizabeth Warren has been [asked](#) what she will do to prevent being "Hillary-ed" (her response: "One might say you persist") and Kamala Harris has spent time [responding](#) to questions about her electability as a Black woman. Asked how she deals with the doubters, Harris [told the Associated Press](#), "You win...you win." On the campaign trail, she has taken on the question of electability head on, [telling audiences](#), "I have faith in the American people to know we will never be burdened by assumptions of who can do what based on who historically has done it."

¹²⁵ [Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018](#)

PARTY GATEKEEPING

Political parties play influential roles in candidate emergence and the campaign process. From candidate recruitment and endorsements to strategic and financial support, parties can significantly affect candidates' likelihood of electoral success. Previous research has shown that parties can act as gatekeepers to women candidates, especially when dominated by male party leaders who question women's electability.¹²⁶ But parties are also more influential in women's decisions to become candidates than they are in men's decision-making process, indicating that any gender bias among party leaders can come at an even greater cost to women's likelihood of running.¹²⁷ In contrast, party intervention to promote women's inclusion and advancement can yield significant benefits.¹²⁸

A spring 2016 survey of local party chairs found no evidence that they viewed women candidates as less likely than men to win, though the authors suggest caution about interpreting the results as gender neutral.¹²⁹ Citing research on gender differences in candidate quality, they note that if party chairs assume women candidates will outmatch men in experience and qualifications, they may be more positive in their evaluations of women's capacity to win. The same study found that local party chairs rated Black and Latina/o candidates as less likely to win than their White counterparts, though they do not find an intersectional effect for Black women or Latina candidates.¹³⁰ This finding indicates that the forces of party gatekeeping function differently for women and men across different racial and ethnic groups.

There are also differences in party support for Democratic and Republican women candidates that are especially notable in considering the party disparity in women's success in election 2018. Extensive research has shown that the support infrastructure available to Republican women considering or pursuing candidacy is less robust than on the Democratic side.¹³¹ Democratic women, and particularly White Democratic women, have benefitted not only from the growth in targeted recruitment, training, and financial backing to progressive women candidates, but these efforts have also appeared to influence party recruitment and support. Especially when outside groups like EMILY's List invest close to \$10 million in backing women candidates, the Democratic Party has an incentive to encourage more women to run.¹³²

The Democratic Party has also seen greater representation of women in party recruitment positions. Since 2012, a Democratic woman has served as either recruitment chair, vice chair, or co-chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC). Two Black congresswomen have served in this role in the past decade, with former Representative Donna Edwards (D-MD) chairing the recruitment effort in the 2014 cycle and current Representative Val Demings (D-FL) serving as a DCCC recruitment co-chair in the 2020 cycle. Democratic congresswomen have also led "Women LEAD," a DCCC initiative to support Democratic women candidates in competitive districts, since it launched in 2013. In the same period, women have been two of five chairs of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee (DSCC),

¹²⁶ Crowder-Meyer 2013; Sanbonmatsu 2006

¹²⁷ Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Butler and Preece (2016) also find that women are more skeptical than men about the degree of support they will receive from party elites after recruitment.

¹²⁸ Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece 2017

¹²⁹ Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2019

¹³⁰ Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2019

¹³¹ Cooperman and Crowder-Meyer 2018; Och and Shames 2018; Thomsen and Swers 2017

¹³² Center for Responsive Politics 2018

which leads candidate recruitment efforts for the U.S. Senate; Senator Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-NV) leads the DSCC in the 2020 cycle and is the first woman of color to take on this role.

Despite the increase in women's representation and power within Democratic Party's campaign arms, the 2018 election witnessed many progressive women candidates who ran – including some who won – without party backing. Progressive groups like Justice Democrats, Brand New Democrats, and Run for Something, among others, served as alternatives to party organizations in recruiting, training, and supporting Democratic candidates in the 2018 cycle, many with a commitment to backing women and minority candidates. Women of color also had to continue to push the Democratic Party to better prioritize diversity and inclusion in the 2018 cycle. In a 2017 letter to Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman Tom Perez, more than two dozen prominent Black women activists, elected officials, and community leaders called on the party to not take Black women's support for granted, writing, "Organizing without the engagement of Black women will prove to be a losing strategy, and there is much too much at stake for the Democratic Party to ignore Black women."¹³³ In April 2019, Perez announced the addition of three women of color to his leadership team as the DNC heads into the 2020 election cycle.¹³⁴

Former Senator Elizabeth Dole (R-NC) was the only and last woman to lead the Republicans' Senate campaign arm, the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), which she did in the 2006 cycle. In 2018, Representative Elise Stefanik (R-NY) served as the first woman to lead the recruitment effort for the National Republican Campaign Committee (NRCC) and made a commitment to recruit more women to run.¹³⁵ While she touted more success in recruiting Republican women than in past cycles, the number of Republican women who filed to run for the U.S. House was not record-breaking and fell far short of their Democratic women counterparts. There are many reasons why these numbers remained low *despite* Stefanik's efforts, including resistance she might have faced from other Republican Party leaders. After the 2018 election, for example, Stefanik argued that her party needed to do better in recruiting women and advocated investing in women candidates at the primary stage to bolster their chances of success. Tom Emmer, the incoming chair of the NRCC responded by telling [Roll Call](#), "If that's what Elise wants to do, then that's her call, her right...But I think that's a mistake." While he [later clarified](#) that it would be a mistake for the NRCC to get involved in primaries, this attitude is a hurdle to more targeted efforts within the party to address the severe underrepresentation of Republican women as candidates and officeholders.



¹³³ See full letter here: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/open-letter-dnc-chair-tom-perez-there-s-too-much-n764221>

¹³⁴ [Forrest 2019](#)

Despite Emmer's comments in 2018, he tapped another woman with a commitment to women's representation – Representative Susan Brooks (R-IN) – as the NRCC's recruitment chair for the 2020 cycle. Brooks has [told media](#) that her party leadership "can demonstrate to people that the women in our conference are being given really big responsibility." Brooks' summer 2019 announcement that she would not be running for re-election, however, might be less encouraging to potential women recruits.¹³⁶ Decisions by Representatives Brooks and Roby not to run for re-election in 2020 mean that only 11 Republican women incumbents remain in the pool to defend their seats in the next election as of September 2019. As [Politico noted](#), there are more men named Jim in the U.S. House than there are Republican women running for re-election in 2020.¹³⁷ To make up for this dearth of Republican women incumbents, extra-party organizations like Winning for Women and VIEW PAC, as well as Stefanik's leadership PAC, E-PAC, are working to recruit and support Republican women candidates earlier in the 2020 cycle.¹³⁸ As the primary season takes shape, the Republican Party's support (or lack of support) for these recruits will serve as one indicator of whether the party serves as a gateway or gatekeeper to women's candidacy and officeholding.

WAITING (OR NOT) TO RUN

The disproportionate caregiving burden borne by women has been shown to delay their entry into the political sphere as candidates and officeholders.¹³⁹ Some recent research suggests that familial responsibilities are no longer a hurdle to candidacy for women, and the presence of mothers of young children as candidates in 2018 offers some anecdotal support for that claim.¹⁴⁰ According to CAWP, more than half of women with children under age 18 in the 116th Congress were elected for the first time in 2018. But the presence of mothers of young children does not mean that caregiving concerns did not affect women candidates differently than men. Recent research has identified the preference for candidates who are married with children as contributing to a "double bind" for women, for whom those roles mean greater labor than men.¹⁴¹ CAWP research has also found that women's decisions to run for office are more relationally-embedded than men's decisions to become candidates, and that includes accounting for the effects of candidacy on those who rely on them for primary care.¹⁴²

In new research, Julie Dolan, Paru Shah, and Semilla Stripp find some evidence that women candidates' caregiving responsibilities still weighed heavily in their decisions to run for congressional office in 2018, even if they were not prohibitive in candidate calculations. Some women noted their concerns about the time demands of being both candidates and caregivers. There are also financial costs to running for office as a caregiver. New York congressional candidate Liuba Grechen Shirley (D-NY) felt these costs first-hand, as a mother of both two- and four-year-olds. In the 2018 election, she became the first woman candidate to spend campaign funds on childcare after petitioning the Federal Election Commission (FEC) for permission. Their advisory decision, which aligned with a [previous decision](#) in favor of a male candi-

¹³⁶ [Pathe 2019](#); In a September 2019 interview, Brooks told [National Journal](#) that her decision to retire has not deterred any potential recruits.

¹³⁷ [Sherman and Palmer 2019](#).

¹³⁸ See Winning for Women Executive Director Rebecca Schuller's [July 2019 column](#) in which she argues the GOP has a "woman problem," but that it can be solved.

¹³⁹ [Carroll 1989](#); [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#)

¹⁴⁰ [Fox and Lawless \(2014\)](#) find that traditional family dynamics *do not* account for the gender gap in political ambition.

¹⁴¹ [Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018](#)

¹⁴² [Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009](#); [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#)

dates' childcare expenses, had important implications for other women concerned about the caregiving costs they will incur if they become candidates for federal office.

According to the [Center for American Women and Politics tracking](#), 14 states have allowed the use of campaign funds in state-level races for childcare as of October 2019. Shirley's 2018 campaign efforts to push for campaign rules that are more family-friendly at the federal level coincided with – and may have even inspired – other women's efforts to petition for similar permissions from state campaign finance bodies. Just a month after the FEC ruling in Shirley's case, for example, the Wisconsin State Ethics Commission [ruled favorably](#) on a request made by state treasurer candidate Cynthia Kaump, establishing that candidates may use campaign funds to pay for childcare directly related to campaign activity. A month later, the Arkansas Ethics Commission [voted unanimously](#) to allow campaign funds to be used for childcare expenses for state house candidate Gayatri Agnew. Other advisory opinions on this type of expense were issued during and after 2018, with [some](#) ruling against permission to cover childcare costs with campaign funds. More durable policy change would come through statute instead of through case-by-case decisions. [As of October 2019](#), only five states have enshrined the practice of using campaign funds for child care costs into law, all since 2018, and other states have bills pending.

Apart from raising attention to campaign finance rules, Liuba Grechen Shirley has also continued her own advocacy to increase the number of mothers with young children in elected office. In 2019, she [founded Vote Mama](#), a political action committee to provide financial support to Democratic women candidates to combat the "motherhood penalty" in political campaigns. In July 2019, Vote Mama advisory committee member and congressional candidate MJ Hegar (D-TX) [successfully appealed](#) to the FEC to further expand the types of childcare that could be covered with campaign funds. These decisions make it easier for parents – women or men – to afford a congressional campaign, but they are just one step toward making political campaigns and institutions more accommodating to caregivers.

While caregiving concerns are real for many women considering candidacy, candidates can also be motivated by their experiences as mothers or parents of young children. In 2018, many women candidates spoke publicly about how being mothers motivated them to run and to make policy change. Kelda Roys' (D-WI) [first campaign video](#) in her bid to become Governor of Wisconsin earned national attention for what she was doing in the ad: breastfeeding her daughter. But what was perhaps more telling was what she said in the ad. Roys described how being a mother informed her policy perspective and priorities, leveraging her motherhood as a credential for office instead of a barrier to officeholding. In her campaign to become Attorney General of New York, pregnant candidate Zephyr Teachout (D-NY) released an [ad](#) in which she received an ultrasound. Paired with a visual of her black-and-white sonogram, Teachout mused about her unborn child, "What does his or her future look like? Do we save our democracy?" She tweeted out the ad with this [message](#): "Being a parent and being in power shouldn't be in conflict for a woman any more than they are for a man."

It was not only mothers of young (or unborn) children that made history in the 2018 election. Two candidates became the youngest women ever elected to Congress. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Abby Finkenauer (D-IA) were both elected at 29.¹⁴³ Prior to their election, Elise Stefanik (R-NY) had been the youngest woman elected to Congress at 30. These women, among others, are part of a new generation of women candidates and officeholders who are not waiting to run or serve until after raising children. They are also not “waiting their turn” to run, challenging party leaders and party incumbents who might discourage their candidacies or discount their ability to win.



Both the ability and willingness of younger women, including women with young children, to run for office has implications for the long-term advancement and more robust and diverse representation of women in American politics. The 2018 election offered some evidence of the expansion of the pool of women candidates in these ways, but further inclusion will require additional efforts to address gender disparities in caregiving, the incompatibility of caregiving with candidacy, and the dearth of recruitment efforts and networks for young women.

Parenthood and the Presidency

The work that women candidates did in 2018 to reduce the constraining effects of caregiving on campaigning and to challenge other factors that have delayed women's candidacies will matter for women running for office in 2020 and beyond. But the different expectations for women and men persist, especially when running for high-level office. Of the 26 Democrats who announced bids for the presidency in 2020, 10 had children under age 18 when they entered the race.¹⁴⁴ The only woman presidential candidate with school-age children was Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), whose sons were 10 and 15 in 2019. Perhaps more notably, two male candidates announced their bids for the presidency with children younger than one year old; both Seth Moulton (D-MA) and Eric Swalwell (D-CA) had children in late 2018. Despite the progress for women candidates running with young children at lower levels of office, the idea that a mother of a newborn could run for President with the same dearth of criticism that Moulton and

¹⁴³ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, born October 13, 1989, is 10 months younger than Abby Finkenauer, born December 27, 1988, making her the youngest woman to serve in Congress.

¹⁴⁴ List includes all candidates who announced a bid for the Democratic nomination for president, according to [The New York Times](#).

Swalwell faced seems implausible. The closest test to this question came in 2008, when vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin faced scrutiny and criticism for running shortly after giving birth to a son.¹⁴⁵

However, there are some indicators of progress in the 2020 campaign. First, major news outlets like [The New York Times](#) and [Vox](#) have investigated male presidential candidates' caregiving roles and responsibilities, cuing the men to speak more candidly about the share of the burden that they bear. And while most of the women running in 2020 either have adult children or have no children, they have drawn from their primary caregiving roles to make the case for their presidential bids. For example, one of the most common stories that Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) shares on the campaign trail is about how her Aunt Bee stepped in to help her juggle her work and caring for a newborn daughter. Likewise, Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) frequently references the painful experience of being forced to leave her ill newborn daughter behind in the hospital as spurring her to first get involved in public policy as an advocate for requiring insurers to pay for longer hospital stays for new mothers. Parenthood still plays out differently for men and women in and out of political campaigns and across levels of office, but progress is evident when caregiving experience is valued and the need to manage caregiving responsibilities is acknowledged for both the men and women who run.

VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

As women calculate the potential costs of running for office, they are also aware of exposing themselves and those they love to risk of harassment and/or violence. While much of the research evaluating violence against women in politics has been conducted outside of the United States,¹⁴⁶ U.S. women candidates are not immune from heightened threats, though these experiences have been less systematically documented.¹⁴⁷ Findings from a 2017 survey of U.S. mayors conducted by six political scientists show that women experience greater physical violence and psychological abuse than their male counterparts as both candidates and officeholders.¹⁴⁸ The authors were unable to analyze racial differences in experience of abuse or violence due to the small numbers of mayors of color in their study.

The availability of social media and online forums to attack candidates has heightened the volume of abuse experienced by women and men who run for political office, but even there, the attacks on women are more likely to [threaten sexual violence and rely on misogynist tropes](#). Unfortunately, those attacks do not cease once women enter political office, and attacks by fellow politicians – including the President of the United States – can further stoke harassment and incite threats of violence against women officeholders.¹⁴⁹ While some women politicians understand this backlash as a cost of disrupting the status quo and say it has not pushed them out of politics,¹⁵⁰ the potentially detrimental effects of this abuse go beyond the risks to individual candidates and officeholders. When women weigh the costs and benefits

¹⁴⁵ In a 2008 piece for *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*, religion columnist Sally Quinn wrote about "Palin's Pregnancy Problem," arguing, "Her first priority has to be her children. When the phone rings at three in the morning and one of her children is really sick, what choice will she make?"

¹⁴⁶ See for example, [Ballington 2018](#); [Bjarnegård 2018](#); [IPU 2016, 2018](#); [Krook 2017](#); [Krook and Sanin 2016](#); [Kuperberg 2018](#)

¹⁴⁷ See U.S. women candidates discuss their experiences with online abuse and harassment as part of the Women's Media Center's Speech Project: <http://www.womensmedia-center.com/speech-project/nameitchangeit>

¹⁴⁸ [Herrick et al. 2019](#), 9-10; The authors combined experiences of psychological abuse or physical violence during their campaign and as mayor.

¹⁴⁹ After repeated [attacks from President Trump](#) in 2019, [The Washington Post](#) referenced the persistence of death threats to Congresswomen Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Pressley (D-MA), and Tlaib (D-MI).

of running for office in the first place, the risk of harassment and violence is among their considerations and could have a deterring effect on their likelihood to become a candidate.

There are also electoral and financial costs to these types of harassment and threats. Candidates exposed to them have to adapt strategies to reduce risk while campaigning, employ security if the threats are deemed significant enough, and dedicate resources from the campaign to monitoring threats. While not discussed or researched in great depth to date in the U.S., the combined psychological, physical, operational, and financial burdens of violence and harassment toward women candidates, especially racial and ethnic minorities and LGBTQ candidates, unfairly increase the costs of running for political office.¹⁵¹

Exposure to threats and harassment is especially high for women running for the highest office in American politics. One [analysis](#) of women running for president in 2016 showed that Hillary Clinton was the target of twice as many abusive tweets as was Bernie Sanders, her Democratic primary opponent; the most common term used in those tweets was “bitch.” The same [study](#) by the firm Max Kelsen found that “bitch” was also the most commonly used term in Twitter attacks on Carly Fiorina, a Republican primary candidate, and noted that tweets against Fiorina were especially sexually-charged and often focused on her gender.

More research is needed to better understand the volume and types of threats faced by women candidates and officeholders with attention to differences by race, party, and level of office. But the 2018 election offered at least anecdotal evidence that the abuse faced by women candidates abroad and women officeholders globally was also felt by women candidates running below the presidential level in the U.S. *The New York Times* reporter Maggie Astor [spoke to](#) women candidates running in different states and for different offices in election 2018 and detailed the types of abuse they faced, noting the particularly sexualized forms of harassment they experienced in person and online. Kim Weaver (D-IA04) a challenger to Representative Steve King (R-IA04), told Astor that she dropped out of the race after a series of threats. Most of the other women Astor spoke with were undeterred by the abuse they felt, in part because it was not new to them. Mya Whitaker, a city council candidate in Oakland, California, told Astor, “It becomes so normalized, the types of things that people say,” adding, “Being a Black woman and existing, in some cases, is enough to piss people off.”

Vermont gubernatorial candidate Christine Hallquist, the first transgender woman nominee for governor in the U.S., also faced online abuse, harassment, and a death threats over the course of her 2018 candidacy. As a trailblazing candidate, she expected the vitriol – much of it transphobic in nature – and did not back down, but her campaign did [have to adapt](#), being more conscious of candidate safety and less public about when and where Hallquist was holding campaign events. While these realities might not deter candidates in a single election, sustained threats can have a detrimental effect on women’s willingness to run for and serve in elected office. For example, in August 2018, Vermont State Representative Kiah Morris (D) – Vermont’s only Black woman lawmaker at the time – dropped her bid for a third term in the state legislature after two years of harassment. Targeted specifically with racist attacks, Morris resigned from office in September 2018.

¹⁵⁰ [Herrick et al. \(2019\)](#) find no reduction in ambition among officeholders who experience abuse and harassment.

¹⁵¹ For more information, see the National Democratic Institute’s #NotTheCost campaign: <https://www.ndi.org/not-the-cost>

When a man grabbed Senator Kamala Harris' microphone at a June 2019 presidential forum, it is no wonder that the outrage was swift and strong; while Harris quickly assured the audience she was "all good," the histories of men invading women's spaces, violence against women, and heightened vulnerability of women of color made cued observers to emphasize what this incident reflected about gender, race, and physical displays of power.

The concern about women presidential candidates' safety and well-being in 2020 will be heightened due to the visibility and high stakes of the race. But threats to and harassment of women candidates and officeholders remain a problem in need of addressing across levels of office and with greater attention to the dangers fomented online.

LEVELING THE FUNDING FIELD

There has long been a perception among candidates, practitioners, and some scholars that campaign fundraising poses a more significant challenge for women candidates than for men, in part because women often lack the personal and professional networks that benefit men's political advancement.¹⁵² This perception persists among women candidates, who believe that fundraising is harder for them than for their male counterparts.¹⁵³ But analyses also show that women candidates can and do raise as much money as men in comparable races.¹⁵⁴ In fact, some research has found that women have a fundraising advantage in some contests or in some measures of campaign finance, such as individual donations.¹⁵⁵

However, equitable campaign receipts may mask the unique difficulties women face to achieve that equity. Women raise money in smaller amounts, which means they must cultivate higher numbers of smaller individual contributions to reach aggregate totals comparable to men.¹⁵⁶ And while women's donor networks and PACs have also helped to close fundraising gaps between men and women candidates, they primarily benefit Democratic women.¹⁵⁷ Relatedly, recent research has found that partisan donor pools are friendlier to the emergence of liberal Democratic women than Republican women, in part because female Democratic donors exhibit a gender affinity effect in their support of women candidates.¹⁵⁸ Gender parity in campaign receipts and expenditures also does not always translate into equal chances of electoral success. Previous research has found differential returns to women candidates on their campaign investments, indicating women may actually require greater amounts of campaign funding in order to achieve levels of success comparable to their male counterparts.¹⁵⁹ Regardless of why women may receive a smaller "bang for their buck" in campaigns, these findings urge caution against assuming that fundraising or electoral barriers for women candidates disappear when they raise and spend the same amounts as men.

¹⁵² [Lawless and Fox 2005](#); [La Raja 2007](#); [Sanbonmatsu 2006](#); [Uhlman and Schlozman 1986](#)

¹⁵³ [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#)

¹⁵⁴ [Bonneau 2007](#); [Burrell 2014](#); [Hogan 2007](#); [Werner 1997](#); for greater complexity on this finding at the state legislative level, see [Barber, Butler, and Preece \(2016\)](#)

¹⁵⁵ [Burrell 2014](#); [Bryner and Haley 2019](#); [Crespin and Deitz 2010](#)

¹⁵⁶ [Crespin and Deitz 2010](#); [Dabelko and Herronson 1997](#)

¹⁵⁷ [Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018](#); [Crespin and Deitz 2010](#); [Francia 2001](#); [Hannagan, Pimlott, and Littvay 2010](#)

¹⁵⁸ [Thomsen and Swers 2017](#)

¹⁵⁹ [Burrell 1985](#); [Green 1998, 2003](#); [Herrick 1996](#)

Most of these studies have investigated gender parity in fundraising without attention to differences by candidate race, but the limited intersectional evidence shows how the financial hurdles might be higher for women of color candidates. CAWP's study of state legislators finds that women of color were more likely than White women to view fundraising as harder for women than men.¹⁶⁰ In an evaluation of congressional campaign receipts between 2000 and 2016, Ashley Sorensen and Philip Chen find that while race and gender alone do not appear to work to candidates' fundraising disadvantage, the interaction of race and gender serve to depress campaign receipts for women of color candidates running as challengers or incumbents. They also find that funding disparities affect candidates' vote share, reinforcing the electoral disadvantage to women of color.¹⁶¹

Looking specifically at party donor support for congressional primary candidates from 2010 to 2014, Hans Hassell and Neil Visalvanich find little evidence of gender or racial bias at the primary stage. However, they find that the Democratic *advantage* to White women candidates is not replicated for women of color.¹⁶² The authors note that study does not account for differences in candidate quality, suggesting that what appears as party agnosticism in support of women and minorities might mask a reality where party donors are supporting women and minorities at equal levels to less qualified men.¹⁶³

The Center for Responsive Politics' (CRP) analysis of 2018 campaign finance reveals similar disparities in fundraising among women candidates by race. While their study of total direct fundraising by U.S. House general election candidates shows that women actually outperformed men, they find that Black women candidates raised the least amount across all race and gender subgroups.¹⁶⁴ This disadvantage to Black women candidates was particularly significant in money raised from large individual donors in 2018. And while Black women in Congress serve, on average, in less competitive districts where fundraising and spending might be lower, the intersectional effects on large individual donations hold when district-level characteristics are taken into account.¹⁶⁵

CRP's report suggests that women House candidates' fundraising advantage in the 2018 election can be explained, at least in part, by the rise in the number of women donors and their concentration of support for Democratic women candidates. They find that 40% of White women candidates' donations came from women in 2018, while just 29% of White men's donations were from women donors. This gender gap in attracting women donors persists for Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and Asian-American women versus men.¹⁶⁶ Party allegiance explains some, but not all of these differences, as women donors were still a larger proportion of donors to women Democratic nominees than to Democratic men who ran for the House in 2018.¹⁶⁷ Finally, all of the 25 general election House candidates who received 50% or more of their total direct contributions from women donors in 2018 were Democratic women.¹⁶⁸ These data suggest that the fundraising success of women candidates in 2018 relied more heavily on women

¹⁶⁰ [Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013](#), 115

¹⁶¹ Chen and Sorenson 2019

¹⁶² [Hassell and Visalvanich 2019](#), 19

¹⁶³ [Hassell and Visalvanich 2019](#), 23

¹⁶⁴ [Bryner and Haley 2019](#), 18

¹⁶⁵ [Bryner and Haley 2019](#), 23-24

¹⁶⁶ [Bryner and Haley 2019](#), 26

¹⁶⁷ [Bryner and Haley 2019](#), 27

¹⁶⁸ [Bryner and Haley 2019](#), 24

donors than in elections past, and that the increase in women donors in the 2018 cycle was a particular boon to Democratic women.

Jacob Grumbach, Alexander Sahn, and Sarah Staszak also look at the independent and intersectional effects of race and gender in congressional donations from 1980 to 2010, focusing more specifically on the positive effects of shared gender and ethnoracial identities between donors and candidates.¹⁶⁹ They find that women candidates and candidates of color earn more contributions from women donors and donors of color, though the effects of shared ethnoracial identity are greater than those of gender. When evaluating gender and race in combination, the researchers find much more modest effects, but do note that Democratic White women candidates receive more financial support from women of all racial groups compared to White men.

Signs of similar reliance on women donors by women presidential candidates was evident through the second quarter of 2019. In an [analysis by CRP](#), women donors made up 50% or more of donors to four of six women presidential candidates (Gillibrand, Harris, Warren, and Williamson); Beto O'Rourke and Julian Castro were the only men to match that level of women donor support. The same analysis showed that there are simply more women making political donations in 2020 than in previous cycles, which may yield particular benefits for women candidates.¹⁷⁰

"Megadonors," or those investing millions of dollars to super PACs, outside groups, and candidates, play some of the most pivotal roles in shaping the financial landscape of political campaigns. As of [August 2019](#), presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) received the second-most campaign funds from the top 100 donors in the cycle thus far; former candidate Jay Inslee (D-WA) came in first. As the Democratic field narrows, these investments will become greater and potentially more influential on candidates' campaign performance.

Financial investment from EMILY's List, the organization committed to electing pro-choice Democratic women, will continue to play a key role in leveling the funding field for women candidates in 2020. And though they have yet to come anywhere near EMILY's List's level of spending in previous cycles, Republican organizations like Winning for Women and VIEW PAC are working to build an equally robust finance infrastructure to support GOP women.¹⁷¹

In looking ahead to future elections, the influence of gender in fundraising should be assessed from both the perspective of candidates and donors. Moreover, gender parity – or even women's advantage – in campaign receipts should be evaluated with attention to not only the differences in financial support to diverse groups of women (race and party), but also the differences in work required to achieve funding parity and the "bang for buck" among women and men candidates.

¹⁶⁹ [Grumbach, Sahn, and Staszak 2019](#)

¹⁷⁰ CRP's Grace Haley [writes](#) after the second quarter of 2019, "Almost 100,000 women have given more than \$200 to a presidential candidate so far during the 2020 presidential elections – nearly four times the number of women donors at this point in the 2016 elections."

¹⁷¹ [Cooperman and Crowder-Meyer 2018](#)

MEDIA AS HELP OR HINDRANCE

Media act as a filter through which the public observes and understands politics and elections. The diversity of media – types, sources, styles, and reach – makes conclusions about its effects on political candidates and institutions difficult to discern in any generalizable way. Instead, research affirms that media *can* play a role in feeding or combatting gender and intersectional biases, but the degree to which they do either has varied based on which media were evaluated, when, and at what level of office studies were conducted.

Some recent research concludes that women congressional candidates do not face disparities in the level or type of media coverage they garner on the campaign trail.¹⁷² However, this is contrary to decades of research finding that women candidates often receive less substantive coverage; more coverage of personal attributes, relationships, and appearance; and more coverage of their viability and electoral chances than men.¹⁷³ The variance in these findings can be explained in part by differences in research methodology and design, as well as *which* women are included in the study.

Research on women of color running for and serving in Congress reveals particular intersectional biases in media coverage.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, most scholars agree that women running for high-level offices like the presidency are the most vulnerable to gendered, including sexist, treatment by media. Evidence from 2008 and 2016 confirms this finding that presidential media coverage is not gender-neutral.¹⁷⁵ And while still early in the cycle, some research on media bias in 2020 has already flagged differences in both the quantity and quality of coverage received by women and men running for president.¹⁷⁶ The prominent presidential candidacies of women of color in 2020 also reaffirm the importance of applying an intersectional lens to analyses of media coverage in the upcoming elections. Already, [analyses cuing intersectional tropes](#) targeting presidential candidate Kamala Harris – just the third Black woman to ever pursue a major party presidential nomination – have been evident in mainstream outlets.



"Harris' inability to keep her cool is something to keep an eye on. This isn't the only time she's going to be challenged on her record in the coming months," writes [@CillizzaCNN](#) cnn.it/2SWdUo2 | Analysis



How you know Tulsi Gabbard really got under Kamala Harris' skin
In Wednesday night's Democratic presidential debate in Detroit, Tulsi Gabbard decided to drop her opposition research book right on Kamala Harris.
[cnn.com](#)

12:05 PM · Aug 1, 2019 · [SocialFlow](#)

¹⁷² See [Hayes and Lawless 2015](#)

¹⁷³ For a comprehensive review, see [Sanbonmatsu \(2017\)](#).

¹⁷⁴ [Gershon 2012, 2013](#); [Ward 2016](#)

¹⁷⁵ [Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman 2018](#); [Rose and Lawrence 2009](#)

¹⁷⁶ See [StoryBench](#) and [FiveThirtyEight](#) for ongoing tracking of media coverage in the 2020 presidential election.



No systematic analysis of gender, race, and campaign media coverage has yet been published on the 2018 election, but those who ran in 2018 have offered interesting and relevant insights to how the media landscape affected candidates in a record-setting year for women. Expressing his frustration in Virginia's 7th Congressional District primary for the Democratic nomination, candidate Dan Ward [told](#) *The Washington Post* of his female challenger Abigail Spanberger, "She's had the red carpet laid out for her in the national media...And gender is really the only reason why." While Ward's assessment is imbued with its own biases, his perception that national media paid particular attention to women candidates in 2018 is not unfounded. The story of women's "surge," particularly as Democratic candidates for Congress, was widely reported in major outlets throughout the election season. From cover stories to front page headlines, attention to the record number

of women running for elected office often featured individual candidates and emphasized their origin stories – what motivated them to run in this political moment. That attention could have well benefited many women candidates in increasing name recognition and exposure, but an emphasis on the gender story of the 2018 election does not mean that women candidates were able to cut through that identity-based narrative to advance their campaign message.

Whether beneficial or not, the attention to gender in election 2018 was also evident in newsrooms' addition of reporters to the gender and politics beat. In 2017, for example, *The New York Times* [hired](#) its first gender editor to ensure that the nation's leading newspaper applied a gender lens to reporting across beats, including politics. A year earlier, [Susan Chira](#) was named senior correspondent and editor on gender issues at the *Times*, covering gender and intersectional dynamics throughout the 2018 election. *VICE News*' Carter Sherman put out a newsletter called "[She's Running](#)" to track women candidates in 2018. Both *VICE* and *The Washington Post* also dedicated resources to documenting women's candidacies in video series. At the Post, a team of women journalists produced "[A Year of Women](#)," a three-part video series on the women making history in the 2018 election, and *VICE*'s "[She's Running](#)" [web series](#) came in four parts.

The diversity of newsrooms, especially at the editorial level, may also influence the ways in which gender and race are covered in political news and the degree to which diverse voices are included in coverage.¹⁷⁷ While recent surveys show an increase in racial and gender diversity in newsrooms in the past two decades,¹⁷⁸ women – and especially women of color – remain underrepresented across most major news outlets¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ [Armstrong 2004](#); [Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming 2004](#); [Correa 2010](#); [Jenkins 2012](#); [Meyers and Gayle 2015](#); for caution on ability of journalist diversity to overcome the influence of dominant race and gender norms in newsrooms, see [Meeks 2013](#); [Pritchard and Stonbely 2007](#).

¹⁷⁸ [ASNE 2018](#)

¹⁷⁹ [ASNE 2018](#), [WMC 2018](#); [WMC 2019](#)

In 2018, a [Shorenstein Center analysis](#) of the political press corps across four major news outlets (*USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *NPR*, and *The Washington Post*) revealed that those covering politics at *The New York Times* were 90% White and 70% male.¹⁸⁰ Likewise, the [Women's Media Center](#) found men wrote more than 60% of print, online, and wire stories on U.S. elections in the fall of 2017.¹⁸¹ A recent [analysis](#) of 2020 presidential primary coverage found that this dominance of male writers persists into the next election; according to [Storybench](#), men wrote more than two-thirds of national stories on the campaign in the spring of 2019.

While these analyses showed that some outlets are more gender and race inclusive in who makes up their politics and elections teams, the dominance of White, male voices in political coverage and commentary goes beyond the newsrooms to effect who is cited or featured in news media. CAWP partnered with Gender Avenger and the Women's Media Center in the 2016 election for [Who Talks?](#), a media tracking project that found men were almost three-quarters of political analysts offering presidential campaign commentary on cable news morning and evening shows from March to November 2016.¹⁸² In 2017, a [Media Matters study](#) showed that morning news show guests were overwhelmingly White and male, even leading into an historic year for women in politics.¹⁸³

Just as – or perhaps even more – important as the persistence of gender and/or intersectional bias in political media coverage is the backlash to it. Whether on social media, in competing news outlets, or via organized efforts to combat bias, the public backlash to perceived media bias reflects some progress in creating a media landscape where bias – even if it persists – does not go unanswered.

Northeastern University's School of Journalism is tracking gender bias in 2020 election coverage at [Storybench](#) and on Twitter using the hashtag [#2020gendertracker](#). And organizations committed to gender equality, including CAWP, are working to call out gender bias in media elsewhere. For example, Melinda Gates launched [Equality Can't Wait](#) in the summer of 2019 to inform and inspire public dialogue about

EQUALITY

CAN'T

WAIT

Start a conversation

Big change starts small. Gender equality can start with a conversation.

Ignite change

When you volunteer or do simple things like call your congressperson, you create change and gender equality from the ground up.

Give to organizations

There are a lot of organizations out there making the world a more equitable place. You can help them do their work.

Recognize bias

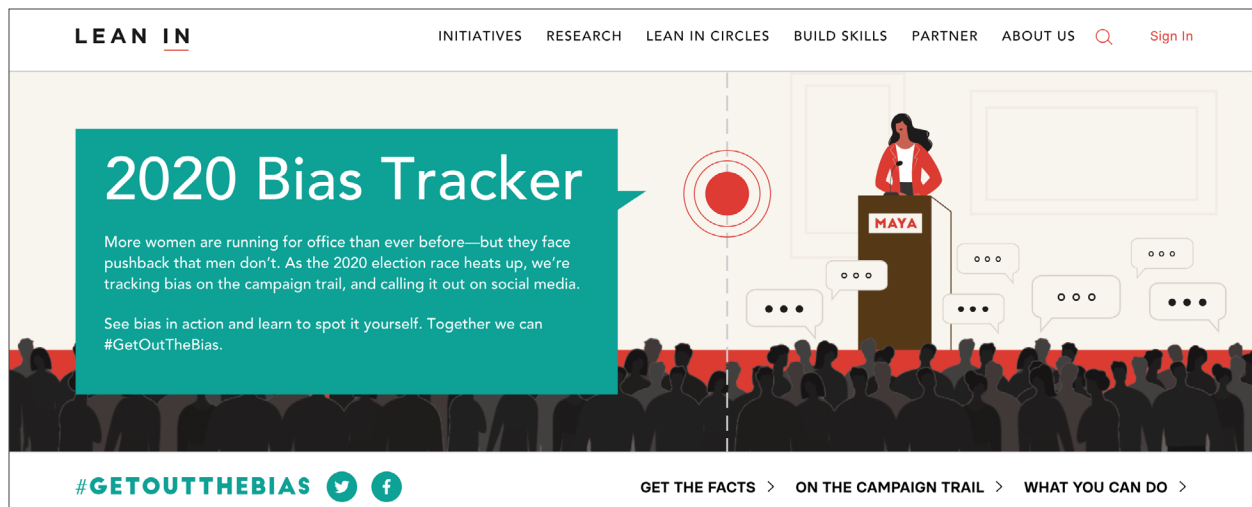
We all need to open our eyes to gender bias—big or small—at home or in the workplace. When we see barriers, we can break them down and accelerate the timeline toward progress.

¹⁸⁰ [Chideya 2018](#)

¹⁸¹ [WMC 2019](#)

¹⁸² [Gender Avenger 2017](#)

¹⁸³ [Lopez 2017](#)



gender equality (and the lack thereof) across sectors, including politics. Lean In has also launched an [initiative](#) to explore gender bias in elections and call it out using the hashtag [#GetOutTheBias](#).

As consumers navigate an ever-changing landscape for political media, so too do candidates. There are multiple sites to evaluate the influence of potential gender and intersectional biases, as well as to determine whether and where media can combat biases in quantity and/or quality of coverage that have historically hurt women running for office.

CHANGING THE OFFICIAL RULES OF THE GAME

U.S. electoral rules and processes do little to facilitate women's electoral advancement or success. Comparative politics scholarship investigates the characteristics of electoral structures that appear best able to facilitate women's levels of political representation. Among cross-national findings are that women do or may fare better in systems awarding representation by proportion (versus winner-take-all) and in multi-member districts (where voters can select more than one candidate on a ballot).¹⁸⁴ Even within the U.S., there is evidence at state and local levels that these types of electoral systems may benefit women and minorities.¹⁸⁵ Quotas requiring a specific proportion of women candidates or officeholders have also increased women's political representation in other countries, but are largely incompatible with candidate-centered U.S. electoral systems.

Most of these rules' changes would be difficult to implement in the U.S., but there has been some movement on reforming electoral rules within states and localities in recent years. In 2018 specifically, Maine became the first *state* to use ranked-choice voting for state and federal primary and general election contests, giving voters the opportunity to rank candidates in order of preference instead of just choosing one. In this system, voters may feel less constrained in choosing the candidate they *expect* to win as their first choice because their preference for second (or third, etc.) choice will continue to influence outcomes. The number of women in Maine's state legislature increased from 33.9% in 2018 to 38.2% in

¹⁸⁴ See for example [Norris and Krook 2011](#).

¹⁸⁵ [King 2002](#); [Sanbonmatsu 2018](#); [RepresentWomen 2018a, 2018b](#); See Fair Vote's review of research on electoral rules and gender in the United States: <https://www.fairvote.org/women-s-representation>

2019, but that rise cannot be attributed directly to ranked-choice voting. In fact, 17 other states saw larger jumps in the percentage of women in their state legislatures from 2018 to 2019, indicating that other factors were at play in increasing women's political representation.

Two other states – California and Washington – have implemented “top-two” primary election systems in the past decade, whereby partisans compete together and the two highest vote-getters advance to the general election. This permits same-party contests in the general election, raising questions about the role of candidate gender when party is held constant. A new study from Katelyn Stauffer and Colin Fisk uses data from congressional elections in those states between 2012 and 2018 to show that Democratic voters favor women candidates in general election contests against men in the same party, controlling for other factors like incumbency and ideological proximity to the woman candidate.¹⁸⁶

These recent and limited cases do not prove that rule changes will always or significantly benefit women candidates. Previous reforms presumed to address gender inequality offer some caution. For example, many assumed that women stood to benefit from state legislatures' adoption of term limits. However, research analyzing the impact of term limits on women's representation since 1990 have shown mixed results. Some studies have shown no difference in women's representational gains between state legislatures with and without term limits,¹⁸⁷ and other analyses showed a decrease in women's representation soon after implementation.¹⁸⁸ More recent studies have shown some benefits of term limits, but specifically to Democratic women in states' upper chambers.¹⁸⁹ Perhaps the most important take-away from this research is that determining the impact of electoral reforms on women's candidacies and representation must be done with attention to both time and related factors (such as building a pool of women to run), and that the effects of these reforms might vary over place and time.

While cases are limited thus far, changing electoral rules in states and cities provide a site for testing hypotheses that advancing representational diversity will take changing both the informal and formal rules of the game.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Stauffer and Fisk 2019

¹⁸⁷ [Caress and Kunioka 2012](#)

¹⁸⁸ [Carroll and Jenkins 2001a](#), [Carroll and Jenkins 2001b](#)

¹⁸⁹ [O'Regan and Stambough 2018](#); [Norlander and Wilcox 2014](#)

¹⁹⁰ See also [Krook and Norris \(2014\)](#) on both quota and non-quota strategies to promote gender equality in elected office worldwide.

LOOKING AHEAD

RUNNING AGAIN

Just as a record number of women ran for office in 2018, so too did a record number of women lose their elections. Will a loss deter women from running again? A study of U.S. House candidates from 1980 to 2014 finds no significant gender difference in losing candidates' likelihood of re-emerging.¹⁹¹ However, gender differences in candidate reemergence might vary by level of office, as a recent study that shows greater attrition among women candidates than men at the local, but not state legislative level.¹⁹² The magnitude of a loss may also matter, though the same congressional study shows that – if anything – women who lost close congressional elections were slightly *more* likely than men to run again.¹⁹³

If they do run again, what are women's chances of electoral success? A [2018 study](#) by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation finds that an electoral loss is not detrimental to voters' perceptions of women candidates' favorability or qualifications.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, the study offers effective strategies for pivoting from a loss to future electoral success.

Women candidates who lost in election 2018 appear to be heeding this advice and continuing a trend, at least at the congressional level, of persistence instead of withdrawal. As of September 2019, 69 (49D, 20R) women candidates for congressional or statewide executive offices who lost their 2018 elections had [already announced](#) their intentions to run in the 2020 election. These "[rebound candidates](#)" include candidates who nearly won their first bids for office in 2018, incumbent women who lost their seats in the Democratic wave, and others who are ready to run again. Their decisions to run again in 2020 illustrate the lasting and positive effect of expanding the pool of women candidates in 2018.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN ELECTION 2020

- **She Persists:** After a year of record numbers of women running and winning, will the 2020 election bring a comparable or even larger pool of women candidates across levels of office? What will be among the diverse motivators for women to run for office in 2020? And will women candidates continue to push us to rethink assumptions about what makes for a good (read "normal") candidate and/or a good (read "normal") woman? Will enthusiasm for women candidates and support for women's representation help women candidates in fundraising and/or at the ballot box? In contrast, will women's gains in 2018 energize opposition seeking to curb their continued success in 2020?
- **Party Parity:** The gender stories for Republican and Democratic women in election 2018 were very different. Will 2020 prove to be a better year for the recruitment and/or success of women in the Republican Party?

¹⁹¹ Thomsen 2018

¹⁹² [Wasserman 2018](#)

¹⁹³ Thomsen 2018

¹⁹⁴ [Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2018](#)

- **Topping the Ticket:** Will a woman top the Democratic ticket for president again in 2020? What hurdles will she have to clear en route to the nomination? What effects might a woman nominee have on women running across other levels of office?¹⁹⁵ And, if the nominee is male, will he select a woman as his running mate?
- **Gender Matters for Men:** How will male candidates navigate the gendered terrain of electoral politics in 2020? What pressure will be placed on them to speak to issues of gender equality (in policy and political representation) and/or to address their own privilege while making the case for their own candidacies? Does their gender strategy and/or performance indicate maintenance or disruption of traditional rules of the game?
- **Interrogating the Intersections:** As the racial and ethnic diversity of candidates increases, how can we better assess the challenges and opportunities faced by distinct groups of women and men candidates without reinforcing binary categories of Whiteness? Recognizing these and partisan differences among candidates will challenge any claims of a single story for women candidates' emergence or success in U.S. elections.

WHAT WE STILL DON'T KNOW

- **Extent of Opportunity:** Women candidates took advantage of a nearly unprecedented number of open seats in 2018 to run and win. While some incumbent officeholders have already announced their decision not to run for re-election in 2020, the extent of structural opportunities for women (and men) to contest especially competitive seats (open or otherwise) is still unknown.
- **Replicating Upsets:** Early indicators from 2020 show higher levels of women running as challengers to members of their own party than in previous elections, perhaps motivated by the notable primary election upsets by women who ran in 2018. But those cases were few in 2018 and it is unclear whether or not incumbent officeholders of either major political party are any more (or less) vulnerable to primary challengers in 2020.
- **Looking Local:** Much of the research conducted on gender and elections focuses at or above the state legislative level.¹⁹⁶ Investigating the gender and racial diversity of candidates for local offices and also expanding research on the distinct factors that affect candidate emergence and success at this level, would be a valuable addition to our understanding of the complete atmosphere in which political power is distributed in ways that differ by gender and/or race.
- **Changing the Rules:** While research from other countries suggests that women fare better in certain electoral systems and under different electoral rules, there is limited evidence of both *what* rules might be changeable and *how* those changes might affect women candidates in the United States. Additional analyses of multi-member districts, ranked choice voting, top-two primary elections, term limits, non-partisan elections, and campaign finance rules, among other areas of structural difference in state

¹⁹⁵ [Ditonto and Anderson \(2018\)](#) find potential punishment to women down-ballot when a woman tops the ballot.

¹⁹⁶ For a review of existing research on women as candidates and officeholders at the local level, see [Holman 2017](#).

and local elections, might reveal helpful lessons about what is both possible and worthwhile in the pursuit of gender parity in U.S. elections.

- **Redistricting Redux:** The 2020 elections will play a key role in determining who will draw new electoral maps after the decennial census. Redistricting has historically created opportunities for newcomers to American politics. In 2020 and 2022, it will be important to pay attention to how redrawn lines might create hurdles or opportunities for groups currently underrepresented in American politics.
- **Candidates Combatting Bias:** While we know that sexism persists in U.S. elections, the efficacy of tools and strategies to combat sexism at the individual and institutional levels are not fully known. For example, which, if any, voters will respond positively to candidates who directly call out gender and/or intersectional biases on the campaign trail? Or, as previous research has shown, is it more effective for candidates to rely on third-party supporters to push back against unfair or unequal treatment?¹⁹⁷ What role do *other* candidates – those not subject to the same biases – play in pushing back against sexism or racism that their colleagues or opponents confront?
- **Media Matters:** Media play a significant role in shaping campaign conversations and in combatting (or perpetuating) biases in quantity and/or quality of coverage that have historically hurt women candidates. But in an era of media evolution as well as ever-changing definitions of what or who media is, evaluating media's effects on both the perpetuation and rejection of gender and/or intersectional bias is no simple feat. Analyses are [smart to avoid](#) emphasis on whether coverage is sexist or not, and instead evaluate *how* coverage, commentary, or even headlines alone reinforce gender stereotypes that might disadvantage women. Journalists can also play a disruptive role, recognizing and [writing about gender biases](#) (their own and others') in ways that educate readers to think critically about the gendered landscape on which campaigns are run.

¹⁹⁷ [Lake et al. 2014](#)