Women and the House: Femininity and Candidate Success in American Politics

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Abstract

This paper analyzes non-incumbent women who ran for the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2020 election to find whether marital status (whether a candidate is married) and motherhood status (whether a candidate has a child) were heuristic cues used by voters in their perception and decision to vote for a candidate. I hypothesized that women who were married and had children would perform better than candidates who were unmarried and had no children. Further, it was hypothesized that the relationship would be stronger among Republican women, as the party stresses conservative family values. No statistically significant relationship was found; however, it may be that other factors—such as race, religion, political experience, etc.—have an impact on marital and motherhood status in ways that were not captured in this study. Although marital status and motherhood status may not be the isolating variables that cue voters into gender stereotypes, there may be other ways in which the gender of a candidate affects voter perception and voting behavior. Gaining an understanding as to why there is such a disparity in men and women leaders is important not only to increase the number of women leaders but also to address the underlying problems of gender inequality that America still faces today This paper also gives recommendations for future research into understanding the gender gap in American politics.

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1. Introduction

Women holding leadership positions has been a highly contentious matter in the United States since its founding. Given that women were not guaranteed the right to vote in America until 1920, it is not surprising that women do not participate in politics at the same level as men. There are three general perspectives as to why men and women's participation in politics differ: that there is no difference between men and women, and women simply prefer to not participate; that there are significant differences that make either men or women more capable to participate; that women face different disadvantages than men when running for office, making it harder for them to win. Past research has looked at why women do not participate in politics as much as men, and most points to the societal barriers and expectations women face as the largest hindrance to women's participation in politics over any genetic component. Regardless of whether the discrepancy is nature vs nurture, there are certainly large gaps in leadership power held by men and women. Though America saw a record number of women running for and winning political offices in the 2020 presidential elections, with just over a quarter of Congress comprised of women and a lack of a female president of the United States to date, the question arises: what do women need to be a leader in the political world?

To refine this question further, this study looks at the characteristics of non-incumbent women who won their primary race and went on to campaign in the general election of the United States House of Representatives in 2020. The main variables of this study are the candidate's party, age, race, marital status, and motherhood status. The data was collected using a combination of data provided by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), campaign websites, interviews, and direct contact with the candidates. Through an analysis of these characteristics and the proportion of the vote each candidate won compared to the presidential nominee of their party, this study attempts to identify whether marital status and motherhood status—very salient cues for gender norms—impact a candidate's success in her bid for office.

The focus on the women's characteristics is due to the theory that women face a "double bind" in the political arena, as they are in a male-dominated field. Research has shown that voters, especially in low-information elections, use stereotyped views of ideologies and competencies of candidates.[1] When in a male-dominated field, women are faced with conflicting demands from their role as a woman and their role as a leader. In general, people expect and prefer women to be communal, kind, concerned for others,

[1] Dolan, *Voting for Women in the" Year of The Woman*, 1998

warm, and gentle, whereas men are expected to be confident, aggressive, agentic, and self-directed.[2] Stereotypes society holds about its leaders tend to resemble the expectations it has for men more than women, and as a result, people more easily credit men with leadership ability and accept them as leaders. Women thus face a double bind of being expected to fit the expectations as a woman while proving she also has the qualities of a leader—a male-centered role.

I propose that women who more easily fit the expectations of a woman by American societal standards are more likely to win a higher proportion of the vote than those who do not. I expect that women who have the characteristics of an "ideal" feminine woman would be perceived to be less threatening to gender norms and in turn also be perceived to be better suited to serve in Congress compared to those that act against the female stereotypes.[3] In this study, the characteristics studied are race, whether the candidate was married/divorced during the election campaign, and whether she has children. Women adhering to feminine expectations will be seen as less threatening, a concept derived from the Social Role Theory, where those who go against the traditions and expected roles of their gender stick out and are more likely to be scrutinized.[4] This study hypothesizes that women who are married and have children will garner a larger proportion of votes than those who are unmarried, divorced, and have no children. As will be explored in the following sections, this relationship is hypothesized to be stronger among Republican candidates than Democratic candidates.

The data for this study is comprised of non-incumbent U.S. House of Representatives candidates from the 2020 election cycle. Candidates from the two largest political parties in America—the Republican and Democratic parties—were used. The analysis only included women running for the House due to the Senate being seen as the "higher" house of the two, as most of the time experienced politicians run for the Senate.[5] Women running for the House as non-incumbent candidates have roughly equal resources, as none have re-election campaigns or a strong incumbent advantage. As they are not incumbent candidates, the voters will be judging their leadership capabilities based on newly presented information, and therefore it will be easier to assess what characteristics will help or hurt a candidate's chance of winning. The proportion of votes won will be compared to the proportion of votes the presidential nominee of that party won in that district in the same election cycle. This will help control for differences in party advantages in each district and better illustrate the characteristics of women that can either help or hinder a candidate's success. This study hopes to provide insight on the double bind women face when running

[2] Eagly, *Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage*, 2007
[3] Aldoory And Toth, *Leadership and Gender in Public Relations*, 2004
[4] Eagly and Wood, *Social Role Theory of Sex Differences*, 2016
[5] Fuller, *Only Eight Current Senators Made It to Capitol Hill with No Political Experience. Eight out of 100*, 2019

for political office, and by doing so, open further discussions on how to alleviate the gender gap in American politics.

In this study, as in line with extensive research on the matter, there was a significant relationship between party affiliation and the vote ratios won by candidates. However, the study found no significant relation between vote ratios and race, marital status, divorce status, or motherhood status. There are many factors involved in voter perceptions of candidates, and the lack of statistical significance of the factors studied here does not necessarily imply that gender is unimportant to voter perceptions of candidates. Instead, I conclude that there may be other factors that should be considered when attempting to isolate how gender influences voters' perceptions.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The United States saw a record number of women run for political offices in the 2020 elections. The previous record was set in 2018, where 476 women ran for the House of Representatives, which was an increase of 59.2 percent compared to the record held before. However, 2020 again saw a record-shattering number of women run, with 583 women candidates for the House. In 2018, the jump in women candidates was largely due to Democratic women running for office. The 2020 record, however, was carried by Republican women, with a 74.6 percent rise in Republican women candidates from the previous election cycle. [6] Despite these great strides, women remain underrepresented in politics. Women constitute more than 50 percent of the U.S. population, yet only represent 29 percent of U.S. House candidates.

Past research has found that voters had little or no gender bias against candidates, and some research has claimed that women candidates have advantages over men.[7] [8]In congressional races, for example, women are not disadvantaged in comparison to presidential races.[9] This may be due to factors such as exposure, where there has been a precedent of congresswomen whereas there is yet to be a woman president. Another factor at play may be that presidents are perceived to deal with issues such as national security and the economy—both "masculine" policy areas—whereas members of Congress deal with domestic

[6] Dittmar, *What You Need to Know About the Record Numbers of Women Candidates in 2020*, 2020
[7] Ekstrand & Eckert, *The Impact of Candidate's Sex on Voter Choice*, 1981
[8] Huddy, Leonie, & Capelos, *Gender Stereotyping and Candidate Evaluation*, 2002
[9] Ono and Burden, *The Contingent Effects of Candidate Sex on Voter Choice*, 2019

issues such as welfare, education, or healthcare—typically viewed as "compassion" or "feminine" issues.[10] [11]

Before they can even become candidates, however, a decision to run for office must be made. Women and men win and lose elections at about the same frequency; however, they do not run for office at similar rates. This is a straightforward issue for gender diversity as a lack of gender representation in the pool of candidates will prevent Congress from achieving gender equality in numbers. In an experiment by Kanthak and Woon (2015), they found that women were less likely to run for office, both through external and internal motivational factors. In addition to external factors such as family obligations, access to money, or political socialization playing into women's decisions, there are also internal factors. Internal factors that make women more risk-averse to running for office compared to men are factors such as stereotype threat, gender expectations, and a lack of desire.[12]

Having women leaders in Washington is an important issue in contemporary American discourse as issues of sexual assault, gender inequality, and the push for a woman president become larger topics in the mainstream. Since 1937, Gallup polls have asked whether respondents would vote for a well-qualified woman nominated for president by their own party. In 1937, only 33 percent of respondents said yes. When the same question was asked in 2015, 92 percent of respondents said yes.[13] There has been a clear change in attitude in the American populace in considering women for political roles previously only held by men, yet women only represent a minority of America's federal legislature. Why do we fail to see women entering political offices at the same rate as men, even as the populace is willing to be led by a woman?

The answer may be rooted in gendered perceptions of likability in leaders. Women and men have, and will continue to have, gender roles and stereotypes associated with them, and these gendered expectations shape how others perceive their leadership potential and likability.[14] The country remains skeptical that gender equality will ever be achieved, and gender stereotypes and expectations continue to hinder women attempting to enter politics.[15] Are women disadvantaged from winning congressional seats if they do not conform to gender expectations? Most women say having to do more than men to prove themselves is a major barrier to female leadership, which is an indication that gendered biases work against women in the

[10] Ono And Burden, *The Contingent Effects of Candidate Sex on Voter Choice*, 2019
[11] Rosenwasser, Miller, and Dean, *Gender Role and Political Office: Effects of Perceived Masculinity/Femininity of Candidate and Political Office*, 1989
[12] Kanthak and Woon, Women Don't Run? Election Aversion and Candidate Entry, 2015
[13] Jones & Moore, *Generational Differences in Support for a Woman President*, 2021
[14] Sczesny, et al., *Gender Stereotypes and The Attribution of Leadership Traits,* 2004
[15] Horowitz, Igielnik, and Parker, *Women and Leadership 2018*, 2018

realm of political leadership. Some studies have indicated that gender is not a disadvantaging factor, but there has been less research done into the qualities of women who are more likely to win that are not based on policy, personality, or past experience, but rather other heuristic gender cues similar to party affiliation or race.

In the following subsections, I explore four trends and arguments, which are pertinent to our understanding of gender disparities in political presentation. First, I examine the history of women in the U.S. House of Representatives to understand the background and precedent of women leaders in the House. Next, I look at past research which has laid the groundwork for my understanding of women leaders, the barriers they may face or the advantages they may have, and how race and gender are an intersection of minority identity in elections. Following this section, I analyze the demographics of the current Congress. Third, I look at party differences between Republicans and Democrats in women's representation and how party affiliation is expected to be an important factor in predicting a woman candidate's success. The next section further explores the idea of a double bind or double standard, which is the basis for this paper. Finally, I present my theory for this study.

2.1 History of Women in the House of Representatives[16]

In 1866, Elizabeth Cady Stanton became the first woman to run for the U.S. House of Representatives. As women were not, and would not, be able to vote until the 19th amendment was ratified in 1919, she relied on men to vote for her. She ran as an Independent in the State of New York. She received twenty-four votes.

Fifty years later, in 1916, Jeannette Rankin became the first woman to be elected to the House of Representatives. She served as a Republican from the State of Montana from 1917 to 1919, serving again from 1941-1942. She was the only member of Congress to vote against the United States' entry into both world wars.

The first woman of color of Asian-Pacific Islander descent to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives was Patsy Takemoto Mink, a Democrat from Hawaii, in 1965. Shirley Chisholm, a Democrat from New York, became the first Black woman to serve in the House in 1969. Mary Rose Oakar (D-OH) was the first Middle Eastern/North African woman elected to the House. The first Hispanic woman to serve in the House was also a Cuban American, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. In 1989, she was elected in a special election to represent the people of Florida as a Republican. She would represent her state until 2019. In 1998, the first woman to serve in Congress from Wisconsin was elected, and she also became the first openly gay

[16] *Milestones for Women in American Politics*

person to serve in the House. Sharice Davids (D-KS) and Debra Haaland (D-NM) both became the first Native American/Native Alaskan women to hold House seats in 2019. In total, eighty-three women of color have served in the U.S. House of Representatives as of the 117th Congress.[17]

Interestingly, a historically common way for a woman to find herself in Congress was through the succession of her late husband or father. This was not uncommon even into the 1970s. Between 1916 and 1980, thirty-five women were either elected to their husband's seat after he died, replaced their husbands on the ballot if they died before the election, or replaced their father. Although this method of entering Congress is less common today, it used to be one way for women to find distinguished careers on Capitol Hill. Margaret Chase Smith won a special election in 1940 and replaced her late husband, then went on to win four House terms, as well as later a seat in the Senate. She became the first woman to serve in both chambers of Congress.[18] Even in the 2020 election, although she did not replace her husband or father, Nikema Williams (GA-05) was chosen to replace the incumbent candidate John Lewis on the general election ballot after he passed before the general election, where she went on to win the seat.[19]

Although this paper will focus on the U.S. House of Representatives, there have been several women who have served in state legislatures. Furthermore, since the early 2000s, Nancy Pelosi has been an important leader of the Democratic Party in the House. We have seen an increase in female representation at the federal level, with the first Black and South Asian woman elected as the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris. Women are holding an increasing number of leadership positions, and it can be argued that the United States has come a long way since its founding, although the U.S. is still far from proportional representation.

2.2 Women and Leadership

Women need to do more to prove their worth compared to their male counterparts.[20] Some research has found that women's participation in the private sector as business leaders coincides with economic gains for that company, yet most leaders in the private sector are men.[21] The barriers that prevent women from gaining leadership positions go beyond having to "prove" one's worth; the barriers are deeply rooted gendered stereotypes that are very hard to overcome. Women are less likely to be seen as a winning candidate by the elite of their political parties, and without the party's support—such as endorsements from party leaders, financial assistance, and campaign training—candidates may never gain the support

[17] *History of Women of Color in U.S. Politics*
[18] *The Widow and Familial Connections,* 200
[19] Booker, *Georgia State Sen. Nikema Williams to Replace Rep. John Lewis on November Ballot,* 2020
[20] Horowitz, Igielnik, And Parker, *Women and Leadership 2018*, 2018
[21] Eagly, *Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage,* 2007

they need to win their respective races.[22] People see men and women as equally capable in key qualities and behaviors essential for leadership, yet a majority of people say there are clear differences between men and women in leadership positions. Of those who believe men and women are different, most perceive women as better in areas of compassion and empathy, both feminine traits that fit our society's gender roles. Female politicians are considered better role models for future politicians and better at maintaining overall tones of civility and respect. The public can clearly identify and acknowledge the benefits of women politicians. Women are even perceived to be better suited to handle most areas of politics.[23] Alas, compared to men, women are far less likely to be encouraged to run for office by major parties, and women themselves are less likely to view themselves as qualified to run.[24] The challenge for a woman is gaining establishment support by proving herself as a qualified candidate in the primary process.

Perceptions of a candidate's policy expertise are also influenced by gender. Due to a combination of low media attention, low voter salience, and therefore low incentive for candidates to make their policy stances clear, voters make assumptions about a candidate's positions based on categories candidates may be placed in.[25] The two categories that are the most accessible and almost impossible to hide from voters are party affiliation and gender. Race, although sometimes easily identifiable, is more complex than party affiliation or gender. Important to note, however, is that research has shown that these inferences are activated when the candidate is of minority status. Thus, race is not activated as a categorization to draw inferences from unless the candidate is non-white, and gender is not activated unless the candidate is non-male (a woman).[26] This deviance from the norm causes a stronger activation of using categories to make inferences on a candidate's policy positions. Better known candidates (i.e., incumbents) are less likely to be subjected to the same process by voters, as information is more accessible to voters based on past performance. Connected to gender stereotypes about qualifications mentioned before, women candidates are more often associated with "compassion" issues such as poverty, health care, the elderly, education, children and/or family issues, the environment, etc. Men, on the other hand, are viewed as more educated on issues like defense, economics, business, crime, agriculture, etc.[27] [28] [29] Furthermore, as issues such as sexual harassment, abortion, women's rights, and equality become more prominent in political discourse, women candidates are considered more adept at addressing such issues due to their gender. Such

[22] Sanbonmatsu, *Do Parties Know That Women Win*, 2006
[23] Horowitz, Igielnik, And Parker, *Women and Leadership 2018,* 2018
[24] Fox & Lawless, *Entering the Arena? Gender and The Decision to Run for Office,* 2004
[25] Conover & Feldman, *Candidate Perception in An Ambiguous World,* 1989
[26] Taylor et al., *Categorical and Contextual Bases of Person Memory and Stereotyping,* 1978
[27] Alexander & Andersen, *Gender as a Factor in the Attribution of Leadership Traits,* 1993
[28] Huddy & Terkildsen, *Gender Stereotypes and The Perception of Male and Female Candidates,* 2002
[29] Koch, *Candidate Gender and Assessments of Senate Candidates,* 1999

perceptions can hurt women if voters are concerned about issues such as the economy, especially in election years in which matters such as economics or war are at the forefront. On the other hand, women can benefit from these stereotypes when voters are predominantly concerned with "compassion" issues, even though the candidate herself may not be particularly well-versed in those policy areas.[30] [31] [32] [33]

Racial minorities also face a different set of circumstances, with the intersection of race and gender impacting voter choice in ways that have not been studied as much. Some theories point to some potential advantages that non-white women can have from tight-knit communities that may be advantageous to women of color.[34] [35] Most research into the relations up between race and voter behavior focuses on Black and white men, with some studies of Latina women in more recent research.[36] [37] Women of color may face further disadvantages due to stereotype threats from both their status as a woman and as a person of color, but some evidence also points to women candidates of color being perceived as less threatening.[38] [39] Stereotype threat refers to a psychological phenomenon where minority group members feel pressure to not conform to their group's stereotypes, which causes them to underperform in that respective area.[40] The most well-known example is where women performed poorly on a math exam when told they were the only woman in a room full of men, compared to women whose gender was not made salient before the start of the exam.[41]

For national elections, voters rely almost exclusively on the media for information on the candidates.[42] In said media, women candidates are more often covered in terms of their personal characteristics instead of their policy stances.[43] Overall, women receive less campaign coverage than their male counterparts, and

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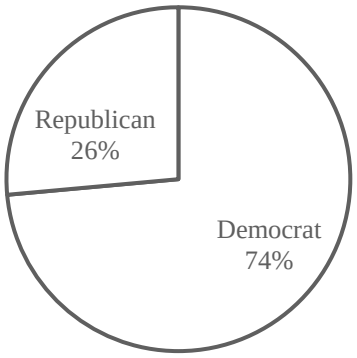
[30] Alexander & Andersen, Gender as a Factor in the Attribution of Leadership Traits, 1993
[31] Dolan, *Voting for Women in the" Year of The Woman,"* 1998
[32] Kahn & Fridkin, *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns*, 1996
[33] Koch, *Candidate Gender and Assessments of Senate Candidates*, 1999
[34] Smooth, *Intersectionality in Electoral Politics: A Mess Worth Making*, 2006
[35] Sanbonmatsu, *Why Not a Woman of Color? The Candidacies of US Women of Color for Statewide Executive Office*, 2015
[36] Ghavami and Peplau, *An Intersectional Analysis of Gender and Ethnic Stereotypes: Testing Three Hypotheses*, 2013
[37] Citrin, Green, and Sears, *White Reactions to Black Candidates: When Does Race Matter, 1990*
[38] Holman and Schneider, *Gender, Race, And Political Ambition: How Intersectionality and Frames Influence Interest in Political Office*, 2018
[39] Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle, *Is Sexism for white People? Gender Stereotypes, Race, And the 2016 Presidential Election*, 2019
[40] Spencer, Logel, and Davies, *Stereotype Threat*, 2016
[41] Spencer, Steele, and Quinn, *Stereotype Threat and Women's Math Performance*, 1999
[42] Kahn, *The Distorted Mirror: Press Coverage of Women Candidates for Statewide Office*, 1994
[43] Kittilson & Fridkin, *Gender, Candidate Portrayals and Election Campaigns*, 2008

the coverage they do receive is more negative, such as discussing their unlikely chances at victory.[44] With all of this, it has been found that when candidate information is withheld, gender roles play a large role in the initial evaluation of female candidates.[45] Furthermore, since the media does not provide equal treatment of coverage for candidates, gender roles may play a large part in voter's perceptions of women candidates for office.

2.3 The 117th Congress

Women make up over a quarter of the 117th U.S. House of Representatives, the highest number in U.S. history. There has been a dramatic increase in women's representation in Congress. However, it still does not reflect the fact that a little over half of the U.S. population are women.

Figure 1. Women Serving In The 117th U.S. House Of Representatives*



*Including both elected members and Delegates
Data from the Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University

In the House, there are 117 women and four delegates. A majority of the women serving in the House are members of the Democratic Party. Only thirty-two, or about 26 percent, of the women in the 117th House of Representatives are members of the Republican Party.

There are a total of 141 women serving in the 117th Congress, including the House and Senate. 34.8 percent (49) are women of color. There are also women of color serving as Delegates to the House from Washington, DC, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands. The U.S. House includes forty-

[44] Kahn & Goldenberg, *Women Candidates in The News: An Examination of Gender Differences in US Senate Campaign Coverage,* 1991
[45] Alexander & Andersen, *Gender as a Factor in the Attribution of Leadership Traits,* 1993

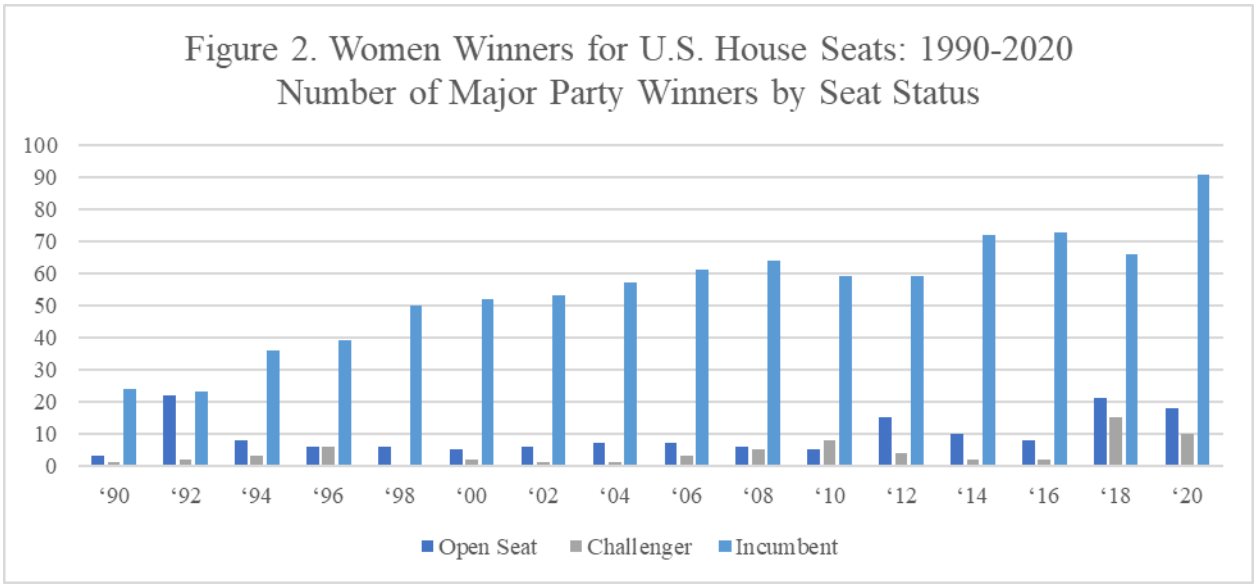
six women of color, of which forty-one are a part of the Democratic Party and five are from the Republican Party. A breakdown of the racial diversity can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Breakdown of Women of Color in the 117th U.S. House of Representatives

	Democratic	Republican
white (non-Hispanic)	*47*	*26*
Black	23	0
Latina	10	2
Asian Pacific Islander	5	2
Middle Eastern/North African	1	0
Native American/Native Alaskan	1	0
Multiracial	1	1
Total	88	31

Data from the Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University

In the 2020 election, there were forty-seven races for the House of Representatives in which a woman ran against another woman.[46] Four of these seats were races in which the incumbent was also running (challenger seats), eleven were races in which no incumbent was running (open), and the rest were races



Data from the Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University

[46] *Woman versus Woman: Congressional and Gubernatorial Races*, 2021

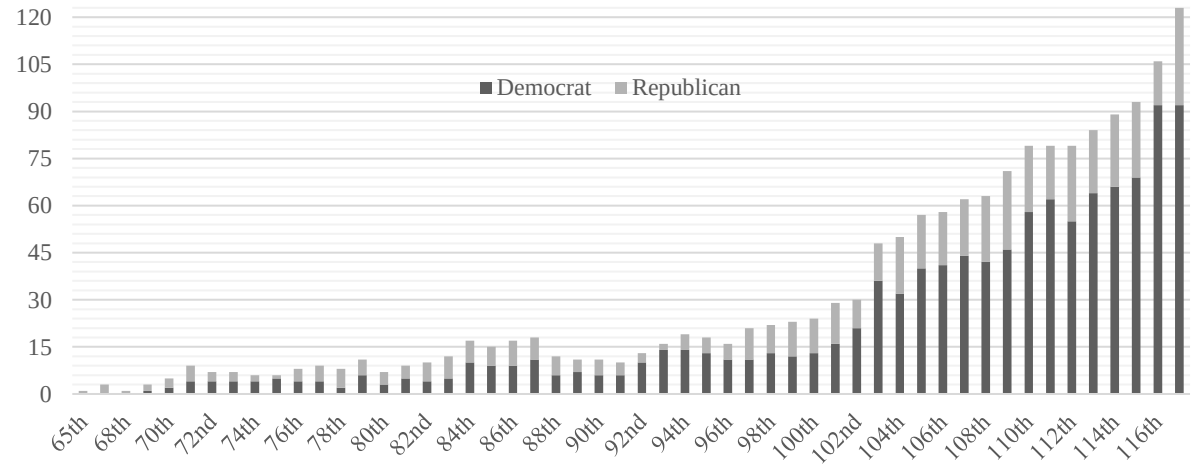
where the incumbent was unchallenged. As illustrated in Figure 2, there has been a steady increase in women winning seats for the United States Congress from 1976 to when this study was done, in 2021.

2.4 Partisan Split

Although women of the Republican Party made some great strides in the House in the most recent election cycle, they clearly make up less of their party than their Democratic counterparts do. This was not always the case, as illustrated by Figure 3. In the earlier days of Congress, of the few women who served in the House, most were Republican. Aside from a temporary narrowing of the gap in the Reagan-Bush era, since the 1970s this gap between the parties has grown, where there are significantly more Democratic women than Republican women in the House. Since 1992, of the 232 women elected to serve in the House, 68 percent have been Democrats.[47] During the 2020 election—among the female candidates—more Democratic non-incumbent candidates won their primaries, but more Republican women won their general elections.

Americans in general, regardless of whether they are a Republican or a Democrat, believe that there are too few women in political leadership positions and that gender discrimination is a major reason why women are underrepresented. Those who identify as Democrats are more likely to believe so than Republicans.[48] As shown above, there is a larger gender difference among Republicans compared to Democrats. A good majority of Republican women say that having to prove their qualifications more than

Figure 3. Women Members of Congress, 1917-Present



Data from the History, Art & Archives, United States of Representatives.
Women Members by Congress, 1917–Present

[47] Blazina and DeSilver, *A Record Number of Women Are Serving in the 117th Congress*, 2021
[48] Horowitz, Igielnik, and Parker, *Women and Leadership 2018*, 2018

their male counterparts is a major reason why there are fewer women in high political offices. The partisan gap still remains even after a considerable increase in Republican women entering politics in the last election.

Past research has shown that people associate the party's ideology with the party's candidates.[49] [50] However, in general, voters view women as more liberal than their male counterparts, regardless of party.[51] [52]These gendered stereotypes intersect with partisan stereotypes and can cause voters to perceive candidates as more liberal than their policies would suggest.[53] Past research has suggested that this can hurt Democratic women candidates and help Republican women candidates, as Democratic women are seen as "too liberal" and Republican women are seen as "less conservative."[54]

Political party is one of, if not the only, the pieces of information presented to voters about a candidate in the voting booth. There is extensive research on partisan stereotypes and how a candidate's party affiliation is the strongest influence on vote choice.[55] Furthermore, the relationship between party and gender is harder to research since (as mentioned above) most women candidates for Congress in the past twenty-five years have been Democrats. Democrats are stereotyped as better suited to address social issues and Republicans are considered more qualified on issues like economics and defense; a similar split in gender stereotypes between men and women. Therefore, party and gender can reinforce each other for Democratic women and offset each other for Republican women. Research has shown that a candidate's gender is less likely to be related to how voters evaluate Republican women compared to Democratic women.[56] It is probably not surprising however, that party affiliation is overwhelmingly the most important source of information on the evaluation of a candidate.[57] In the case of Republican women, the stereotypes of gender and party are conflicting, and it appears that party stereotypes are a stronger factor in shaping evaluations.[58]

2.5 Double Bind and Double Standard

Due to the role of leaders historically being attributed to men, stereotypes about leaders generally resemble male stereotypes rather than female stereotypes. For example, people credit men more easily

[49] Conover & Feldman, *Candidate Perception in An Ambiguous World*, 1989
[50] Franklin, *Eschewing Obfuscation? Campaigns and The Perception of US Senate Incumbents*, 1991
[51] King & Matland, *Partisanship and The Impact of Candidate Gender in Congressional Elections*, 1999
[52] McDermott, *Race and Gender Cues in Low-Information Elections*, 1998
[53] Koch, *Candidate Gender and Assessments of Senate Candidates*, 1999
[54] Koch, *Candidate Gender and Assessments of Senate Candidates*, 1999
[55] Sanbonmatsu, *Do Parties Know That Women Win*, 2006
[56] Dolan, *The Impact of Candidate Sex on Evaluations of Candidates for The US House of Representatives*, 2004
[57] Huddy, Leonie, & Capelos, *Gender Stereotyping and Candidate Evaluation*, 2002
[58] Dolan, *The Impact of Candidate Sex on Evaluations of Candidates for The US House of Representatives*, 2004

with leadership ability and qualities, and thus are more readily accepting of them as political leaders.[59] Due to the gender norms described earlier, women are viewed as lacking in the stereotypical directive and assertive qualities of good leaders, but women who display very directive and assertive qualities are disliked for being "unfeminine."[60] Women face a lose-lose situation where they experience disapproval for their masculine behaviors, like asserting their authority over others, but also for their more feminine behaviors, like being concerned for others, or being emotional, in their leadership positions. This may be a reason why we have seen women candidates who run for highly visible, nationally-elected offices increasing stress toughness and aggressiveness—qualities typically attributed to men.[61]

People believe that being assertive and ambitious mostly hurts a woman's chances of getting ahead in politics, as they are seen as stereotypically male traits. Yet showing emotion hurts women more than men in politics, although emotionality is seen as a female trait.[62] [63] Why is it that women seem to be so narrowly defined in leadership? One reason could be that leadership has historically been depicted in masculine terms.[64] Thus, it has been more difficult for women than men to become leaders in male-dominated fields, such as politics. An editorial in the New York Times by Bob Herbert in 2006 perfectly exemplifies this; he predicted that Hillary Rodham Clinton's toughest issue and largest handicap would be her gender, and indeed, in 2008 and in 2016 she faced many sexist criticisms during her run for the presidency.[65] I argue that women only get to the top of places once those places have been devalued, such as secretary positions, but national political offices will most likely remain valued and coveted positions.[66] As a position loses its perceived power and status, that position is devalued and thus more "fitting" for women. When positions have been devalued, women are viewed as competent enough to fill the roles, because of the double bind and double standards women face when in leadership positions or when attempting to attain them. A double bind is defined here as when women are faced with accommodating the sometimes-conflicting demands of their roles as women—gender roles—and their roles as leaders, which are often seen as "masculine."

This presents a clear challenge to women trying to enter the field because of this incompatibility of people's expectations of women and leadership. When roles are extremely masculine, people may feel that women are not qualified for them and resist a woman's authority. This is a part of Social Role

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[59] Eagly, *Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage*, 2007
[60] Eagly, *Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage*, 2007
[61] Huddy, Leonie, & Capelos, *Gender Stereotyping and Candidate Evaluation*, 2002
[62] Horowitz, Igielnik, and Parker, *Women and Leadership 2018*
[63] Aldoory And Toth, *Leadership and Gender in Public Relations*, 2004
[64] Eagly, *Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage*, 2007
[65] Herbert, *Hillary Can Run, but Can She Win*, 2006
[66] Eagly, *Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage*, 2007

Theory, where social perceivers (in this case, the voters) concentrate on the minorities of categories, and therefore pay higher attention to the adequacy of female leadership.[67] In our society, we observe and expect men and women to behave differently, and we infer corresponding traits from said behaviors.[68] When women (or men) break from these expectations of the role they are supposed to play, they stand out and attract our attention. In the political field, women receive more scrutiny, by both voters and the media. Women in highly masculine domains must be strong, skillful, and persistent as they have to contend with expectations and criticisms that they lack the toughness and competitiveness needed to succeed as a leader. Individuals who identify or are perceived to be women of color or in the LGBTQIA+[69] community may even face double or triple the amount of prejudice compared to a white, heterosexual woman.[70] Female politicians have to worry about projecting an undesired amount of gravitas, as men have long held political roles and have defined the styles of leadership to which people have grown accustomed to. Men do not have to talk about being a husband/father, but in the same breath, men are compelled to adopt some traits thought to be more feminine in situations where the policy is considered a "compassion" issue. It is therefore unclear whether gendered stereotypes hurt or help women in political elections, and/or if they uniformly impact women's campaigns.

2.6 Theory

A candidate's gender is one of many factors voters consider when electing representatives. Gender alone is not a make-or-break factor in a voter's decision, but rather influences the strength of or modifies the voter's decision in the broader context of all the information a voter acquires. There is a very real chance that although gender may be an important factor in a voter's decision in isolation, it loses its impact when measured against all other potential variables in a voter's decision. It is impossible for a voter to make an evaluation of a candidate based on gender alone—unless the voter is extremely misogynistic and refrains from voting for any women candidate—making it difficult to separate out the influences of other variables in a voter's evaluation of a candidate.

The incumbency or challenger status has been found to be an important factor in a candidate's evaluation. Voters generally have less information and salience on challengers than incumbents, and therefore gender becomes a more prominent factor when evaluating challenger candidates than incumbent candidates. Research has shown that women challengers in the Democratic party were viewed as more liberal, whereas incumbent Democratic women were perceived as less liberal than challengers. Among the

[67] Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, *The Leadership Styles of Women and Men*, 2001
[68] Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, *The Leadership Styles of Women and Men*, 2001
[69] LGBTQIA is an acronym for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual community
[70] Eagly, *Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage*, 2007

Republican party, incumbent women are perceived as less conservative than their male counterparts, but a significant difference was not found between incumbent and challenger women in the party.[71] Gender is therefore not used as a blanket evaluation factor but rather can become more or less salient depending on the availability of other information.

Most research, as discussed above, examines voter behavior, policy positions, and/or the personality of candidates but fails to examine other salient characteristics of the women themselves. The perceived "superiority" of male traits in leadership does not make it impossible for women to win, and studies have shown that women who portray themselves as possessing such "masculine" traits that are typically attributed to men may be able to reverse the effects of gender stereotypes in voter's minds.[72] Because political leadership has been defined by men, the gender roles given to women do not fit the stereotype of "leader," and therefore women need to show they are "manly" in leadership while maintaining feminine qualities.

If traditional gender roles matter in elections, they are more likely to matter in the general rather than in the primary. Women need the party's support to win their primaries, in which the voters are members of the party of the candidate and have a higher chance of evaluating them based on other factors besides their gender, as mentioned before. However, in general elections, candidates must also gain the support of other voters outside of the politically active party members. In general elections, voters are less knowledgeable and less motivated to do their own research, and voters tend to rely on heuristic cues and stereotypes to inform their vote choice. Therefore, this paper hypothesizes that women who show feminine traits through characteristics like marriage and having children will allow them to fit the "masculine" leadership role while upholding gender norms. This will then make it more likely for such candidates to win more votes compared to candidates who are unmarried or do not have children.

3. Research design

In this study, I use several regression models to determine whether marital status or motherhood status affects a non-incumbent woman's chances of winning a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2020 election.

The data used in the following analysis was collected using a combination of existing datasets and organic data collection using campaign websites, interviews, social media pages, and outreach to the candidates. The list of candidate names, party, and race was provided in a dataset from the Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP). Data regarding the number of votes won

[71] Dolan, *The Impact of Candidate Sex on Evaluations of Candidates for The US House of Representatives*, 2004
[72] Huddy, Leonie, & Capelos, *Gender Stereotyping and Candidate Evaluation*, 2002

was found using the website Ballotpedia, a digital encyclopedia of American politics and elections. The number of votes won by the presidential nominee in the district was provided by the website Daily Kos Elections.[73] Characteristic traits including birth year, marital status, divorce status, and motherhood status were found through organic searches on candidates' campaign websites, social media, interviews found online, and through direct contact with the candidates.

There were 200 non-incumbent women candidates who ran for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2020 who went on to run in the general election. Of these 200 women, 28 won their general elections and are currently serving in the House.

3.1 Variables

There were several variables collected for analysis: the candidate's race, age, marital status, divorce status, and motherhood status.

3.1.1 Race

Race was categorized into the following: Asian/Pacific Islander (API), Black, Middle Eastern/North African (MENA), Hispanic/Latina, white, multi-racial, and Native American/Native Alaskan. It is important to note here that Hispanic/Latina is not a racial category but an ethnic one. However, in this analysis, it was important to differentiate those who identified as Hispanic/Latina as a separate category from white. Hispanic/Latina women face different challenges than those who identify as singularly a white woman, and Hispanic/Latinas constitute the largest ethnic minority in the United States.[74] If a woman identified as more than one race or ethnicity, she was categorized as "multi-racial." Data on race was collected by CAWP through direct contact with the candidates, and therefore race was self-reported. Race is an important intersection of gender and politics as it plays a significant role in American political discourse. Race, although a social construct, does have stereotypes attached to it that can influence voters' decisions when in the voting booth. By including race in this study, the study acknowledges the historical and present differences women of different races face and provides a better analysis of the barriers to entry. The distribution of race can be found in Table 2.

[73] Nir, *Daily Kos Elections' Presidential Results by Congressional District*, 2020
[74] Noe-Bustamante, Lopez, & Krogstad, *U.S. Hispanic Population Surpassed 60 million in 2019*, 2020

Table 2. Racial Distribution of Candidates

	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic/ Latina	MENA	Multi-Racial	Native American/ Native Alaskan	White	*Total*
Democrat	3	22	6	2	4	2	73	*112*
Republican	4	13	12	0	1	1	51	*82*
Total	*7*	*35*	*18*	*2*	*5*	*3*	*124*	*194*

The racial distribution of candidates is shown in Table 2. Most of the candidates in the study self-identified as white (124). This is congruent with American demographics, as most of America identifies as racially white.[75] Thirty-five candidates identified as Black, eighteen identified as Hispanic/Latina, seven as Asian/Pacific Islander, five as multi-racial, three as Native American/Native Alaskan, and two as Middle Eastern/North African. Of those who won their primary and went on to the general election, there were two Republican API women, two Democratic black women, three Hispanic/Latina women (1 Democrat, 2 Republican), nineteen white women (4 Democratic, 15 Republican), and one multi-racial Democrat. The multi-racial candidate was Marilyn Strickland, who identifies as Black and API. There were 6 candidates that did not report their racial identity for a total of 194 data points on race.

3.1.2 Age

Age was collected through manual searches on candidate's campaign websites, social media, interviews available online, and through direct contact when necessary. Age has nineteen missing data points, as neither the candidate nor her team responded to requests for information. While age itself may not seem important to whether a candidate wins office, the intersection of age, marital status, and whether a candidate has children does serve as a significant variable of interest.

Table 3. Age Distribution of Candidates

	25-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+	*N*
Democrat	2	32	30	28	15	*107*
Republican	1	12	21	29	9	*72*
Total	*3*	*44*	*51*	*57*	*24*	*179*

[75] QuickFacts United States Census

The age distribution of candidates was quite large, with the oldest candidate being 78 years old during the 2020 election, and the youngest being 27 during the 2020 election. The average candidate was about 48.5 years old, and the modal age among candidates was 51. Among Democratic candidates, the oldest was 78 and the youngest 27, with the average age being a little over 47, and 44 being the model age. Among Republicans, the oldest was 68 and the youngest 27, with the average age being 50.1, and 58 being the modal age. Republicans were, on average, older than Democratic candidates, as can be seen in Table 3. Of those who won the election, the oldest was 65, the youngest was 31, averaging at around 50.9, and the modal at 65. There were twenty candidates for which data on their age was missing.

3.1.3 Marital and Divorce Status

Marital status was collected through identical means as age. Marital status was coded as 0 for unmarried candidates and 1 for currently married or widowed candidates. A candidate's previous marital status was not coded thus each candidate's status reflects their marital status during the election campaign. The status of marriage continues to be considered important to women's femininity in some cultures within the U.S. Women are somewhat expected to "settle down" between the ages of 30 to 35. Although American culture does not have the same stigma of "leftover women" as in China or some other more conservative cultures, there remains an expectation that women should be married by their early thirties to start a family and raise children.

Divorce status was collected in tandem with marital status and was coded as 0 for not divorced and 1 for divorced. Although the stigma around divorced women has decreased over the years, it is unclear how divorce status may or may not affect voter perceptions of a candidate and was therefore included in the analysis. If a candidate had been divorced and then remarried, only her status during the election campaign was coded, meaning she would be coded as not divorced but rather married. Finding information not disclosed by a candidate would require time and energy most voters do not give during elections. Therefore, a candidate's previous divorce status (nor marital) was not coded and only her current status was coded.

Table 4. Marital Status of Candidates

	Not Married/Single	Divorced	Married/Widowed	*Total*
Democrat	26	8	65	*99*
Republican	13	4	52	*69*
Total	*39*	*12*	*117*	*168*

As shown in Table 4, although the partisan difference in marital status is not very large, there is a slightly larger proportion of married women in the Republican party. Among Democrats, 66 percent (65) were married during their campaign, about 8 percent were divorced, and about 26 percent were not married or single. Among Republicans, 75 percent (52) were married, 6 percent (4) were divorced, and 19 percent (13) were not married or single. The study was unable to find information on the marital status of 32 candidates. It was equally as easy to find the marital status of Democratic and Republican candidates; 85 percent and 83 percent of the candidates' marital information was found, respectively. There were 32 candidates for whom information on their marital status could not be found. Of those who won their seat, 11 percent of both Republicans and Democrats were unmarried or single, 11 percent of Democrats and 21 percent of Republicans were divorced, and 78 percent of Democrats and 68 percent of Republicans were married.

3.1.4 Motherhood Status

Motherhood status, or whether the candidate has children, was found using a similar method to marital status and age. The age of the children or the number were not taken into consideration, as the important aspect of this variable is whether or not the candidate could portray herself as a "mother" to the voters. Most women who had children mentioned their children on their campaign website or in an interview, and it was presented as a part of their identity. ("A mom, a wife, a proud American," for example.) The ability to have children is one that is exclusive to those born with female reproductive systems, and many consider motherhood a natural role for women at the appropriate age. Motherhood could also connect candidates to other mothers, who share similar concerns about their own children.

Table 5. Motherhood Status of Candidates

	No children	Children	*Total*
Democrat	22	78	*100*
Republican	10	57	*67*
Total	*32*	*135*	*167*

A larger proportion of Republicans had children compared to Democrats, as shown in Table 5. Among Democratic candidates, 78 percent (78) had children and among Republican candidates, 85 percent (57) had children at the time of their 2020 campaign. Among those who won the general election, 84 percent (16) of Republicans and 67 percent (6) of Democrats had children.

3.2 Method

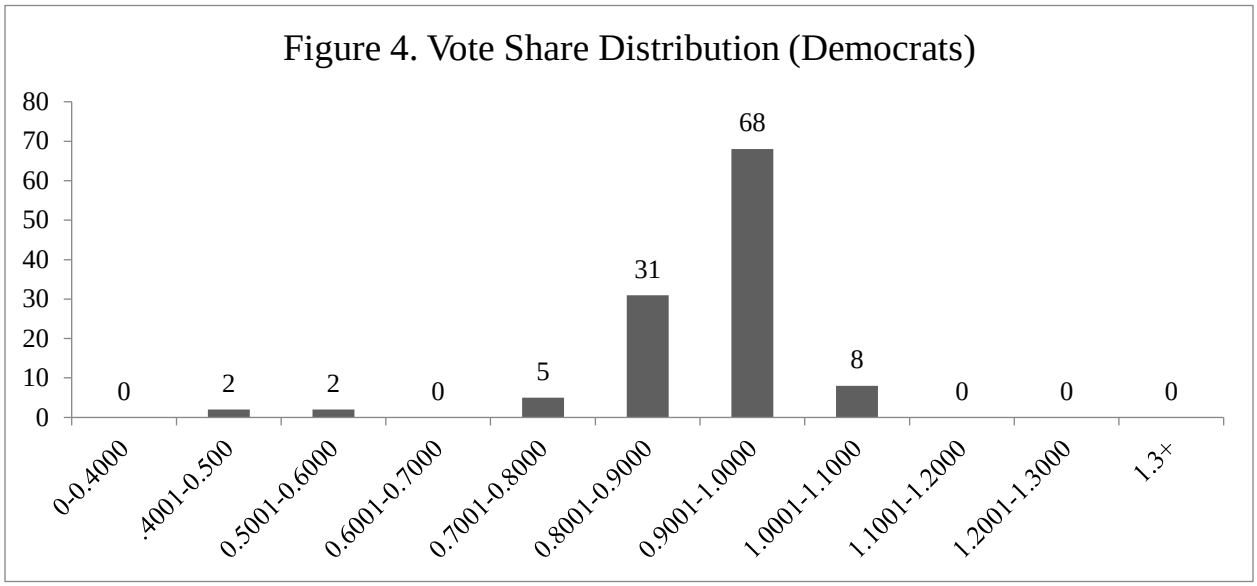
Data was collected using a combination of existing databases and organic research. All data was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet where all data analyses, including regressions and Chi-Squared tests, were done. A linear regression model was used for this study to analyze whether there was a relationship between marital or motherhood status—along with other factors such as party, seat status, race, and age—and vote ratio.

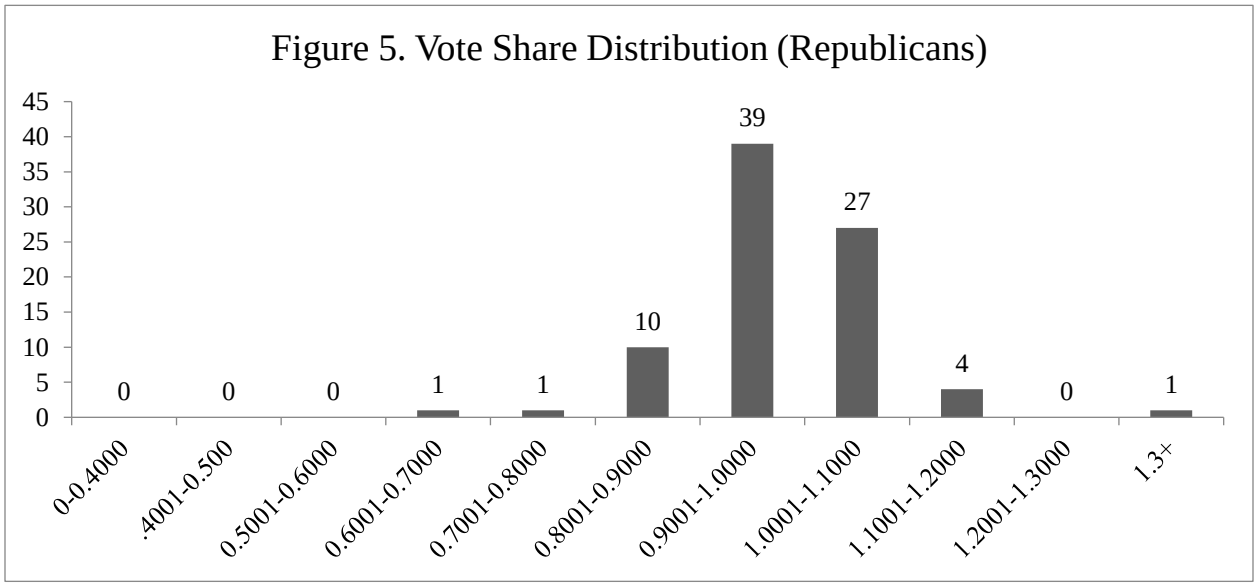
The dependent variable studied was the vote ratio won by a candidate, calculated by taking the number of votes won by the candidate and dividing it by the number of votes won by the presidential nominee of the candidate's party within the same district. The dependent variable measured was the vote ratio of votes the candidate won and the number of votes the presidential nominee of the candidate's party won in that district. The denominator is meant to control for size variation and the partisan nature of different districts. If a candidate won more votes than the presidential nominee of their party, it showed that they had high support from voters, and if they had less, it showed that they had less support from party members than their presidential nominee. As most people vote down-ballot, meaning they vote along party lines for all seats in an election, not receiving the same number as the presidential nominee shows that voters had a reason not to vote for the candidate, for whatever reason that may be. In the 2020 election, the "Trump effect" or the tendency for people to go to the polls to specifically vote for or against the former president of the United States, may have affected turnout and voting behavior. Thus, comparing the number of votes a candidate received to the number of votes of the presidential nominee in the same election year became vital. A traditional form of analysis may compare the number of votes won by the candidate to another year within the same district; however, doing so could complicate the analysis as in the 2020 election there was the "Trump effect," in 2016 there was the "Clinton effect," and in 2012 or 2008 there was the "Obama effect" which all influenced voters' motivations in different ways. Therefore, although certain voters voted specifically against or for one of the presidential nominees, the effects on the election varied across election cycles and should be compared within years, not between.

A linear regression analysis was used to analyze the effects of the characteristics on vote share. The vote share distribution ranged from .4900 to 1.3916 among all the candidates in the study. A value greater than "1" denotes that the candidate outperformed her party's presidential nominee, while a value less than "1" denotes that the candidate underperformed the presidential nominee.

$$\textit{Vote Ratio} = \frac{number\ of\ votes\ won\ by\ candidates}{number\ of\ votes\ won\ by\ the\ presidential\ nominee\ of\ the\ candidate's\ party}$$

Figure 4 shows the distribution of vote share among Democratic candidates in this study, while Figure 5 shows the same for Republican candidates. Democrats in this study have less variation, as shown by most of the candidates performing the same as the presidential nominee, Joe Biden. Some candidates underperformed, compared to Biden, but very few outperformed him. Republicans, on the other hand, saw more candidates outperforming the presidential nominee, Donald Trump than underperforming.





Data on marital/divorce status and/or motherhood status were not readily available. This study individually researched candidate's campaign ads, interviews, websites and utilized direct contact to collect such data. There was predictably variation in how accessible such information was across campaigns. Candidates, by either providing or withholding certain cues, influence the perceptions voters

have of them. Candidate's behavior and media coverage can influence the accessibility of this information to voters and prime certain categories to be activated or not.[76] Given this, if a candidate's marital, divorce, or motherhood status were not mentioned in any campaign materials, ads, or social media posts easily accessible online, the data was coded as missing, and the candidate was not included in models including those variables.

4. Results

Several combinations of regression models were run to determine how marital and motherhood status impacted candidate's vote share with the inclusion of different variables. Model 1 forms a baseline understanding that party affiliation is a statistically significant variable in vote share won, and in Model 2 age is added to measure how much of an impact age alone had on vote share. According to my theory, age alone does not impact voter's choice, but the relationship between age and expectations of marriage and having children will. In Model 3, the key independent variables are added to the model, as it was expected that the impact of party and age would change through the addition of said variables in the model. Table 6 shows the significance levels of each variable in Models 1-3.

Model 1 regresses vote ratio against party affiliation and seat status—whether or not the candidate was a challenger in the general election. When a candidate is a Democrat and running for an open seat, they are expected to win about 91.27 percent of the vote Joe Biden won in that district. A Democrat running as a challenger is expected to win 91.40 percent of the vote Biden won. When a candidate is a Republican running as a challenger, they are expected to win 98.29 percent, and a Republican running for an open seat is expected to win 98.16 percent of the votes Donald Trump won in that district.

$$Vote\ Ratio = 0.9127 + 0.0689(Republican) + 0.0013(Challenger) \qquad (1)$$

Along with party affiliation and seat status, age is added to the regression in Model 2. When age is added to the regression, being a Republican becomes slightly less influential, whereas Challenger seat status increases in influence. However, age has a minuscule effect on the vote ratio won by the candidates overall.

$$Vote\ Ratio = 0.8861 + 0.0732(Republican) + 0.0077(Challenger) + 0.0005(Age) \qquad (2)$$

[76] Conover & Feldman, *Candidate Perception in An Ambiguous World*, 1989

Model 3 regressed vote ratio against the variables in Model 2 and also includes marital status, divorce status, and motherhood status. When Marital Status, Divorce Status, and Motherhood Status are added to the regression, Republicans, Challengers, and Age all slightly increase in their influence on the vote share. However, across all regression models, Republican (Party) is the only statistically significant variable.

$$Vote\ Ratio = 0.8599 + 0.0761(Republican) + 0.0136(Challenger) + 0.0006(Age) + 0.0024(Marital\ Status) + 0.0124(Divorce\ Status) + 0.0218(Motherhood\ Status) \quad (3)$$

Table 6. Regression Results for Vote Ratio

	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*
Constant	0.9127	0.8861	0.8599
Republican	0.0689***	0.0732***	0.0761***
	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)
Challenger	0.0013	0.0077	0.0136
	(0.9393)	(0.6553)	(0.4543)
Age	-	0.0005	0.0006
		(0.4752)	(0.4895)
Marital Status	-	-	0.0024
			(0.9006)
Divorce Status	-	-	0.0124
			(0.7079)
Motherhood Status	-	-	0.0218
			(0.2603)
Adjusted R Squared	0.1059	0.1230	0.1237
N	199	179	160

*Note: Significance levels: *** < .01; ** < .05; * < .10*

Models 4-7 introduce race-related independent variables. As mentioned earlier, the impact of race on vote share is unclear from previous research, and as such, it was important to add race to the same regressions run in Models 1-3. Table 7 shows the significance levels of each variable in Models 4-7.

Model 4 regresses vote share against party affiliation and seat status along with a candidate's status as white. Republican, Challenger, white candidates are expected to win 99.29 percent of the vote, with whiteness having a negative effect on the regression. A Democratic, open-seat, non-white candidate is expected to win 91.82 percent of the vote.

$$Vote\ Share = 0.9122 + 0.0662(Republican) + 0.0018(Challenger) - 0.0043(white) \quad (4)$$

In Model 5, party affiliation and seat status were again included, but non-whiteness was added to the model in place of the variable *white*. Although according to the theory non-whiteness will trigger the racial heuristic among voters, it is unknown how each race independently impacts vote share, and thus was run as a separate model. In this study, a candidate can only be one of the races, and if she identifies as more than one, she falls within the multi-Racial category. MENA, Hispanic, multi-Racial, and Native American/Native Alaskan variables had negative effects on Vote Share.

$$\begin{aligned} Vote\ Share = {} & 0.9228 + 0.0672(Republican) - 0.0066(Challenger) + 0.0578(API) \\ & + 0.0282(Black) - 0.0534(MENA) - 0.0376(Hispanic) \\ & - 0.0773(Multi\ Racial) - 0.1385(NA) \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

In Model 6, similar to Model 3, age was added to the model to examine the impact it has on the estimation of vote share. White women appear to have a slight disadvantage. Being married also had a slight disadvantage in gaining a higher vote share, although very minor.

$$\begin{aligned} Vote\ Share = {} & 0.8626 + 0.0744(Republican) + 0.0131(Challenger) + 0.0006(Age) \\ & - 0.0035(white) - 0.0017(Marital\ Status) + 0.0076(Divorce\ Status) \\ & + 0.0245(Motherhood\ Status) \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

In Model 7, the same was done as in Model 6 but with the non-white race variables. Middle Eastern/North African, Hispanic, Native American/Native Alaskan had a negative effect on vote share, as did being married and being divorced.

$$\begin{aligned} Vote\ Share = {} & 0.8733 + 0.0739(Republican) + 0.0112(Challenger) + 0.0004(Age) \\ & + 0.0656(API) + 0.0349(Black) - 0.0453(MENA) - 0.0328(Hispanic) \\ & + 0.0003(Multi\ Racial) - 0.1489(NA) - 0.0070(Marital\ Status) \\ & - 0.0031(Divorce\ Status) + 0.0298(Motherhood\ Status) \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

Table 7. Regression Results for Vote Ratio (Including race)

	(4)	*(5)*	*(6)*	*(7)*
Constant	0.9122	0.8626	0.9228	0.8733
Republican	0.0662*** (0.0000)	0.0744*** (0.0000)	0.0672*** (0.0000)	0.0739*** (0.0000)
Challenger	0.0018 (0.9153)	0.0131 (0.4817)	-0.0066 (0.6929)	0.0112 (0.5447)
white	0.0043 (0.7634)	-0.0035 (0.8389)	-	-
Asian/Pacific Islander	-	-	0.0578 (0.1070)	0.0656 (0.1822)
Black	-	-	0.0282 (0.1138)	0.0349 (0.1175)
Middle Eastern/North African	-	-	-0.0534 (0.4177)	-0.0453 (0.5145)
Hispanic/Latina	-	-	-0.0376 (0.1093)	-0.0328 (0.2497)
Multi-Racial	-	-	-0.0773** (0.0467)	0.0003 (0.9955)
Native American/Native Alaskan	-	-	-0.1385** (0.0106)	-0.1489** (0.0126)
Age	-	0.0006 (0.4722)	-	0.0004 (0.6507)
Marital Status	-	-0.0017 (0.9322)	-	-0.0070 (0.7329)
Divorce Status	-	0.0076 (0.8245)	-	-0.0031 (0.9279)
Motherhood Status	-	0.0245 (0.2173)	-	0.0298 (0.1307)
Adjusted R Square	0.0939	0.1125	0.1615	0.1632
N	195	157	195	157

*Note: Significance levels: *** < .01; ** < .05; * < .10*

5. Discussion

5.1 Analysis

Does marital and motherhood status matter for women in U.S. Congressional elections? From the results of this study alone, it would appear that the answer is no. It was originally thought that because marital status and motherhood status are often key characteristics that women candidates share about themselves, such cues would lead voters to react to them in certain ways. I argue that the results from this study should not be used to dismiss factors such as marital or motherhood status, but rather to understand that there are several factors that limit the individual impact these factors have on their own. For example, although the research is still muddled with contradictory results, there is some evidence from previous research that shows that gender attitudes across racial/ethnic groups can differ.[77] As this study only looked at the characteristic of the women candidates and not the voters, it is unknown whether different racial groups judged candidates differently. If such a difference existed, candidates running in majority-minority districts may have had different impacts on their vote ratio compared to those running in majority-white or more diverse districts.

Another potential reason for the lack of significant impact of marital and motherhood status on candidate's vote share may be that the 2020 election was largely perceived to be a referendum of the former President Donald J. Trump his policies rather than those of individual candidates. Candidates were therefore evaluated as either being a Trump loyalist or not, and the argument is that voters weighted their decisions based on this assessment more than any other.[78] Perhaps in a future election year where the presidential nominees are less controversial, it would be easier to see the impacts of candidate characteristics on vote share.[79]

The idea that the 2020 election was a referendum on Trump may also be supported by the fact that Republican candidates outperformed Trump at a higher rate than Democratic candidates did the Democratic presidential nominee—Joe Biden. As shown in histograms in Figures 4 and 5, Republicans outperformed Trump more than Democrats did, and this may be a sign that Republican voters were motivated to vote for candidates who either were in support of Trump or in opposition to his policies. Most notably, open QAnon supporter Marjorie Taylor Greene's victory was attributed to the growing

[77] Kane, *Racial and Ethnic Variations in Gender-Related Attitudes,* 2000
[78] The Editorial Board, *The Trump Referendum,* 2020
[79] See limitations for more details

number of voters who supported Trump and wanted to see his policies continued.[80] For Democrats, on the other hand, it was more likely that voters would vote along party lines.

As expected, party affiliation is a very important factor in vote choice. As past research has shown, party identification is the most important factor in understanding voter behavior, and this study further confirms this theory.

Interestingly, seat status was not as important to a woman's vote share in the 2020 election. Although incumbency advantages have been shown to exist, it failed to have any significant effect on the vote ratio in this study. This could be because the study looked at the seat status of the general election, and open seats in partisan districts will be more favorable to one party, regardless of both candidates being challengers. However, the study attempted to negate the effects of partisan districts by using vote share ($\frac{number\ of\ votes\ won\ by\ candidates}{number\ of\ votes\ won\ by\ the\ presidential\ candidate\ of\ the\ candidate's\ party}$) so that each candidate was compared to the presidential nominee within the same district. Given this, it would appear that in the 2020 election, being a challenger to an incumbent was not a disadvantage for women.

The relationship race has in voter choice is still an area that requires further study. As mentioned before, race in political elections is a very nuanced and hard to study issue due to its intersections with gender, race, region, language, immigration, history, etc. Past research has mainly focused on Black and white men, and experimental studies using randomly generated fictional candidates in an attempt to capture the effect of race on voter decision. In this study, race was found to have a very small effect, with multi-racial and Native American/Native Alaskan women showing a slight negative effect with statistical significance in regressions (6) and (7). However, when the same regressions were run for just Democratic candidates, a slightly positive effect was found for Hispanic/Latina and Native American/Native Alaskan candidates with statistical significance.[81] Among just Republicans, a notably significant positive effect was found for Asian/Pacific Islander and Black candidates.[82]

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

There were several limitations to this study that may be countered in a more robust study in the future. To begin, there may be a primary effect that was not captured in this study. The primary effect here refers to the filtering of candidates that occurs during the primary elections, in which only candidates with high party support survive to go onto the general election. This could mean that the high proportion of

[80] Levin, *QAnon Supporter Marjorie Taylor Greene Wins Seat in US House,* 2020
[81] See Appendix, Table iv
[82] See Appendix, Table v

married/widowed candidates seen in this study is due to a filtering of candidates during the primary elections, and therefore does not accurately reflect how these characteristics affect a candidates' vote share. However, as mentioned before, gender stereotypes are less likely to be activated during a primary election, as primary voters are more likely to be knowledgeable about candidates and care more about the party's candidate. In situations in which salience is high, surface-level heuristics are less likely to be activated, and therefore it could be predicted that gender is less important in the primaries. However, it is important to show this, and future research should include an analysis of primary elections as well, looking at whether such characteristics help or hurt a woman in the primaries.

Another element not captured in this study are the characteristics of women who decide to run in the first place, compared to those who do not. If women believe that their marital status or motherhood status could negatively affect their chances of winning and decide not to run, the characteristics of women who run (and subsequently win their primary) would be limited in this study. As already explored in this paper, women tend to be more risk-averse when deciding to run for political office. If they believe it to be true that women are judged based on their marital and motherhood status, those who believe their status would hurt their chances of winning are less likely to run compared to those who believe it will help them, or at the very least not hurt them. Women also tend to think more about how their campaigns for office will affect their family, and therefore we may see a filtering of the types of women who run even before the primaries begin.

A conscious decision was made to only look at non-incumbent U.S. House of Representative candidates to limit the effects of experience and incumbency advantage. However, the study does not include a control for past political experience or campaign finances. Including these controls would help future research as experience and finances help a candidate by increasing her name recognition and ability to run campaign ads. Although all candidates were non-incumbent U.S. House candidates, some candidates previously served on city councils, were involved in other local governments, or had run for the same seat in a previous election. Thus, such candidates may have had more name recognition by voters and therefore their gender was a lesser factor in vote choice, or their previous experience with politics helped them in their campaign efforts. Although the impact of these effects may be negligible, future research should include them in their controls.

As mentioned before, the relationship between race and elections is a confusing and hard-to-research area. As with gender, there are primary filtering effects, averseness to running in the first place, and other factors such as economic disparities that affect different races differently in their decisions to run for political office. More research is needed on the relationship between race and gender in politics, as well as a better understanding of the barriers to entry for different racial groups. Other intersecting variables

may be at play besides race as well. Religion is another factor that may contribute to a candidate's popularity, given that Christianity is still a large part of many aspects of politics and American life.

Attempts at quantifying "femininity" may be an impossible task, and marital status and motherhood status were chosen for this study as they are widely announced during campaigns and are therefore accessible to voters when analyzing a candidate. There are other characteristics of a woman candidate that may contribute to a voter's decision in relation to her femininity, such as charisma/personality, tone or pitch of the voice, or physical attractiveness.[83] Some previous research has found that physical appearance and leadership style can work to balance each other, with women employing a transformational leadership style (high charisma) with a less feminine appearance still performing well in elections.[84] The purpose of this study was to attempt to find a more easily accessible characteristic that low-salience voters may have used in their decision process in relation to gender, and future research into women candidates should continue to work to find what characteristics or factors of a candidate's gender play into voter's choices.

This study is also limited in that it only looks at women. A comparison with non-incumbent men candidates would create a more robust look at the characteristics of marital status and mother/fatherhood status. Based on previous research, being a husband or father may help men in their election bids more than it does women, as men tend to find it more advantageous in showing "compassion" qualities mostly attributed to women. Future research should also show whether being single or childless hurts or helps men candidates at the same rate as it does for women.

Beyond the characteristics of the candidates themselves, the study did not look at the electorate itself and the characteristics of voters. There is research that shows that women are more likely to vote for women than they are men.[85] [86] [87] [88] Women are more likely to vote for the Democratic party than they are men, where 56 percent of women and 42 percent of men identify as Democrats according to Pew data from 2019.[89] Therefore, there is a possibility that the gender gap in women's representation is a reflection of this partisan gender gap; however, women as a group have a higher turnout, and therefore such effects most likely had a very small impact on this study.

[83] See Lev-On and Waismel-Manor 2016 and Boas 1994
[84] O'Malley, *Women and the House: Transformative and Transactional Leadership Styles on the Path to the United States House of Representatives*, 2019
[85] Burrell, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Campaigning for Congress in the Feminist Era*, 1996
[86] Hershey, *The Politics of Androgyny*, 1977
[87] Ferree, *A Woman for President*, 1974
[88] Welch & Studlar. *British Public Opinion Toward Women in Politics: A Comparative Perspective*, 1986
[89] Igielnik, *Men and Women in the U.S. Continue to Differ in Voter Turnout Rate, Party Identification*, 2020

As mentioned throughout this paper, the effects of the former president on voter choice are unclear, and it may therefore be more appropriate to study non-presidential election cycles. Although Congressional elections cannot be isolated from the Executive Office and its performance, it may be more appropriate for studying candidate traits. A robust study would include several election cycles of both Presidential election cycles and off-year elections.

The effect of the presidential nominee on voting behavior also affects the dependent variable of this study, the vote ratio. Another possible dependent variable to measure could be the number of votes won compared to the previous election cycle, i.e., comparing the 2020 election results to the 2018 election results in the same district. However, given that the effects on turnout differ between on and off-year elections, as well as the political party in power during the presidential elections, it is hard to say whether or not this measurement would be any more effective than the one used in this study.

Finally, it is hard to isolate what factors of "femininity" impact a voter's decision, and there is a high probability of a multicollinearity problem in this study. Marital status and motherhood status were found to not be independent through a Chi-Squared test $X^2(1, N = 173) = 5.67$, $p > .05$. This study was limited in that only linear regression models were used, and future studies should use other models or reduce the number of correlated predictors and replace them with less correlated variables such as charisma, physical appearance, etc., as mentioned before.

6. Conclusion

This study was unable to find conclusive evidence that either marital status or motherhood status helps or hinders a woman's chances of winning elections. Isolating what factors related to gender affect vote share will require a more robust study that includes several other controls to investigate the intersections between race, age, religion, gender, etc.

The impact of gender on political elections remains unclear, and further research is needed in the area to begin to understand how a candidate's gender affects voter decision, if at all. Although there seems to be a consensus in the field that gender does play some role in elections, it is unclear exactly what role it plays. Some research points to women candidates having advantages in congressional elections, whereas others claim only certain types of women have advantages in elections.

Although this study did not find the significance of marital and motherhood status on candidate's vote share, this finding does not dismiss the idea that gender impacts how voters perceive and evaluate candidates. Understanding the way gender plays into a woman's campaign for congressional office is an ongoing issue and will require more research.

The argument that voters base their decisions on candidate's policies and competency rather than gender is a welcomed reality. However, the gender disparity in Congress and other elected positions tell us otherwise. Understanding why there is such a disparity is important not only to increase the number of women leaders, but to address underlying problems of gender equality that America still faces today. Future research should continue to look into the barriers to entry and ways that a woman's gender affects how voters perceive and evaluate them.

7. Appendix

Figure i. Regional Distribution of Candidates

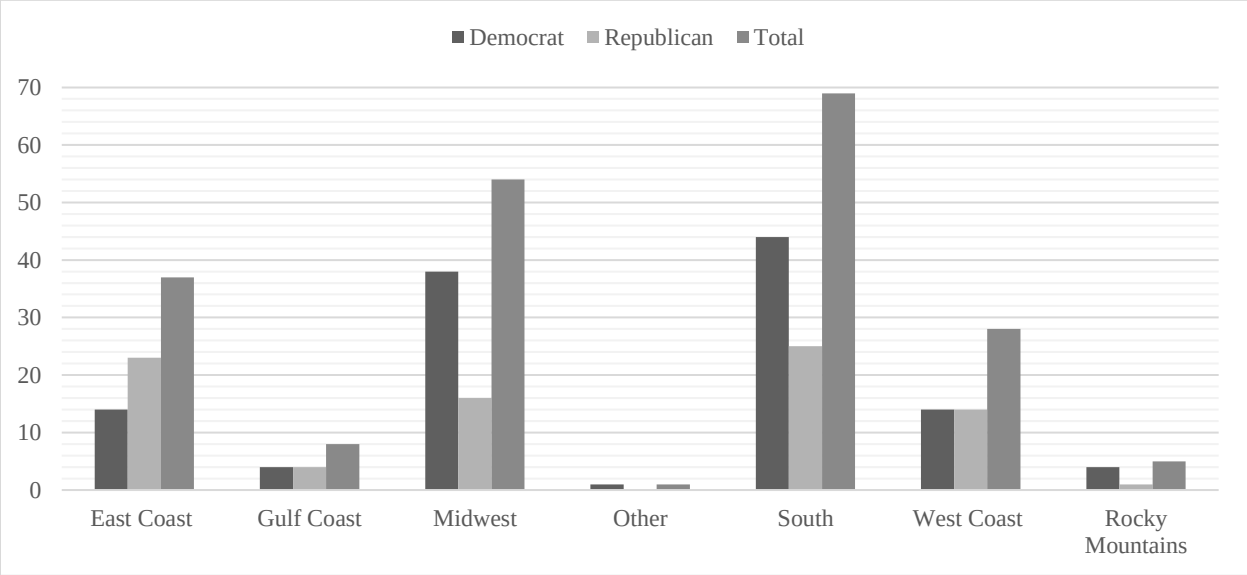


Table i. Data Summary of Age Distribution

	minimum	maximum	mean	mode	*N*
Age	27	78	48.5	51	*179*
Democrat	27	78	47.4	44	*107*
Republican	27	68	50.2	51	*72*

Figure ii. Age Distribution Of Democratic Candidates

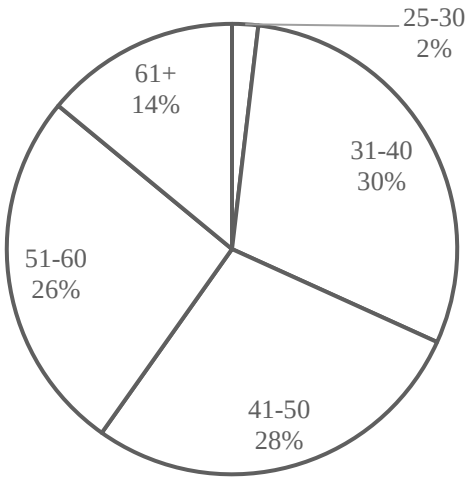


Figure iii. Age Distribution Of Republican Candidates

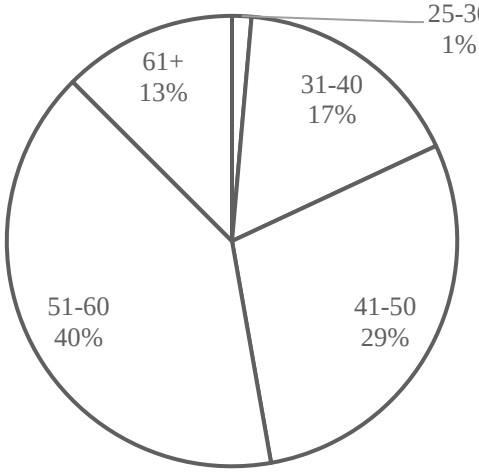


Figure iv. Age Distribution Of Candidates

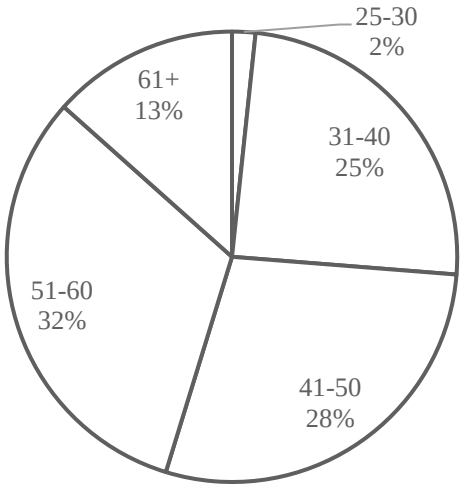


Figure v. Motherhood Status Of Democratic Candidates

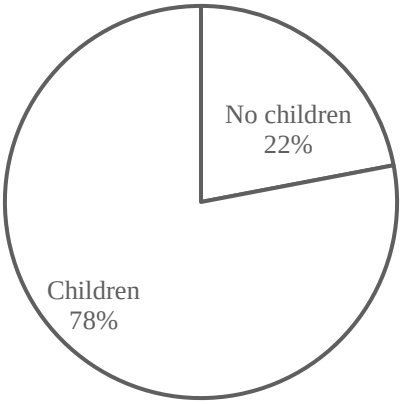


Figure vi. Motherhood Status Of Republican Candidates

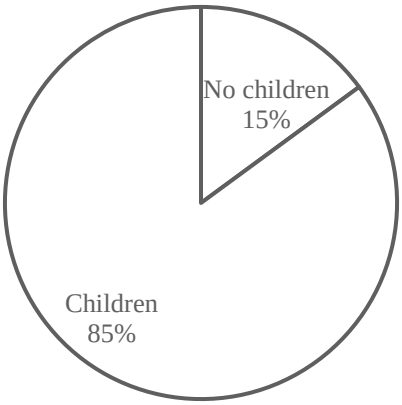


Figure vii. Motherhood Status Of Candidates

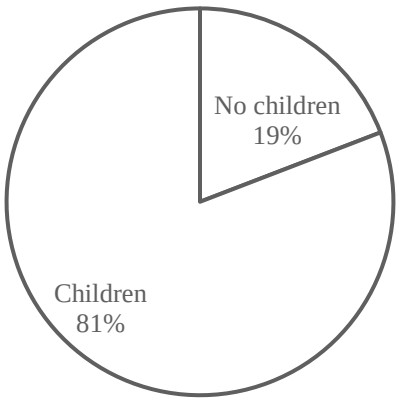


Figure viii. Maritial Status Of Democratic Candidates

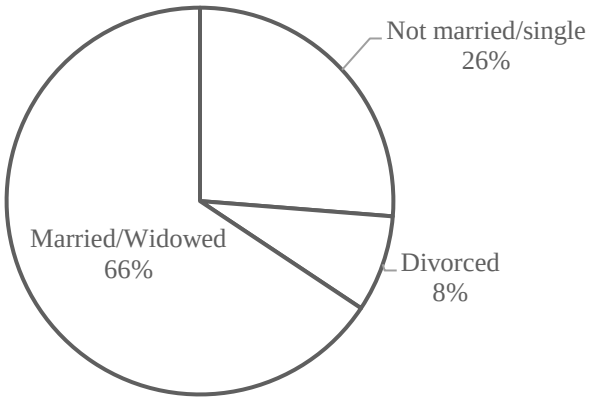


Figure ix. Marital Status Of Republican Candidates

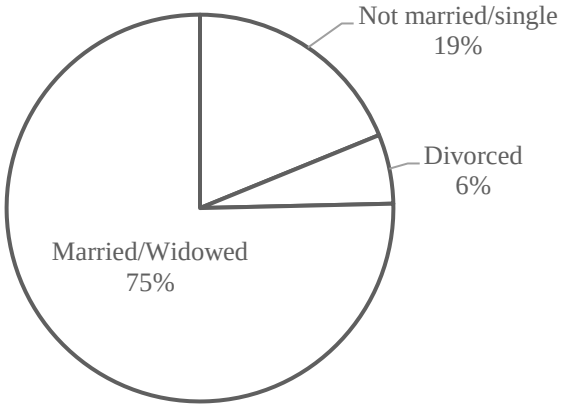
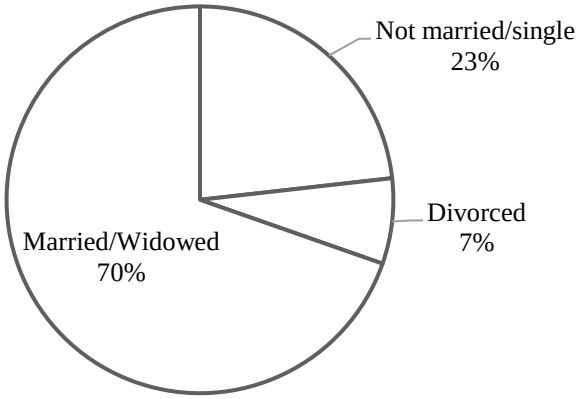


Figure x. Marital Status Of Candidates



There were 11 candidates that openly identified as a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. All but one, Mary M. Fay, were a part of the Democratic Party. Mia Mason identified as transgender, and the other candidates were lesbian or bisexual. None were able to win the general election, but all had very high vote ratios, signifying that members of the candidates' parties voted for them in similar numbers to the presidential nominee of their party.

There were only eleven candidates who self-identified as LGBTQIA+ on either their campaign website, in interviews, or through responses to requests for information. However, it is important to include this variable in this study as openly serving as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community does hold stigma and some voters may feel prejudiced against those who openly identify as such. By including this variable in the study, it recognizes the barriers such members of the community must overcome to earn their place in political leadership.

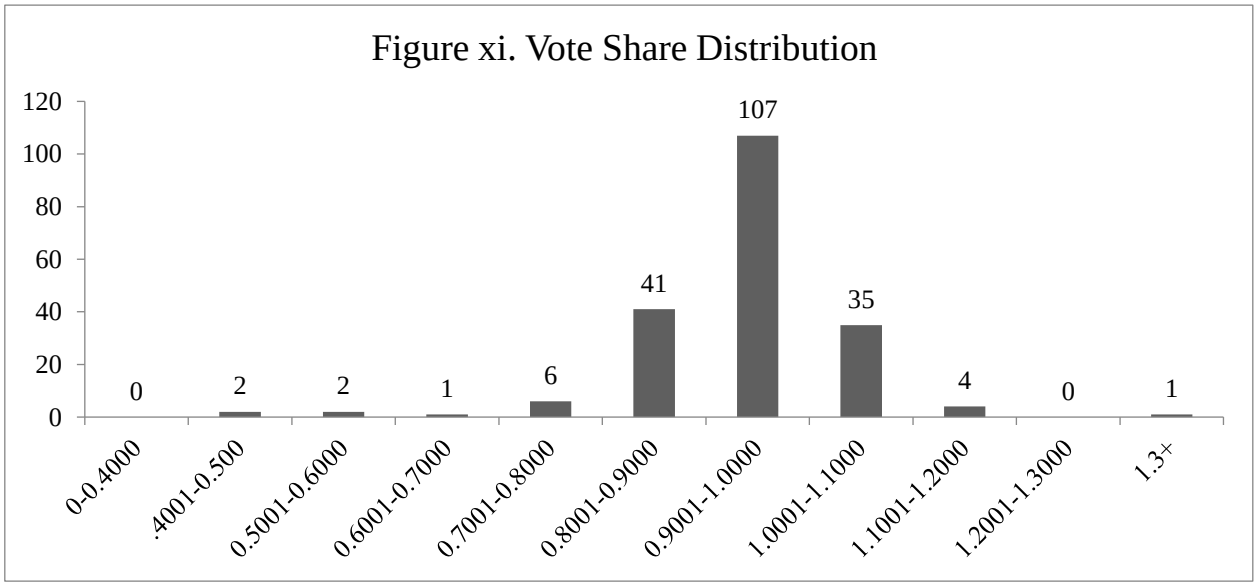


Table ii. Values of Variables

Attributes	Values
Party	Democrat= 0 Republican=1
Seat Status	Open=0 Challenger=1
Marital Status	Unmarried/Single=0 Married=1
Divorce Status	Not Divorced=0 Divorced=1
Motherhood Status	No Children=0 Children=1

Table iii. Vote Share Distribution

	minimum	maximum	mean	*N*
Vote Share	0.4900	1.3916	0.9424	*199*
Democrat	0.4900	1.0883	0.9136	*116*
Republican	0.6716	1.3916	0.9826	*83*

Table iv. Regression Results for Vote Ratio (Democrats)

	(8)	*(9)*	*(10)*	*(11)*	*(12)*
Coefficient	0.8055*** (0.0000)	0.8857*** (0.0000)	0.9349*** (0.0000)	0.8119*** (0.0000)	0.8197 (0.000)
Seat Status	0.0224 (0.3501)	0.0057 (0.7890)	-0.0059 (0.7772)	0.0226 (0.3494)	0.0247 (0.3182)
White	-	0.0400** (0.0400)	-	0.0053 (0.8867)	-
Asian/Pacific Islander	-	-	0.0129 (0.8063)	-	0.0724 (0.2894)
Black	-	-	-0.0030 (0.8904)	-	-0.0027 (0.9423)
Middle Eastern/North African	-	-	-0.0662 (0.3031)	-	-0.1246 (0.1284)
Hispanic/Latina	-	-	0.1429*** (0.0003)	-	-0.0853 (0.1118)
Multi-Racial	-	-	-0.0236 (0.6167)	-	0.0754 (0.2263)
Native American/Native Alaskan	-	-	-0.2303*** (0.0005)	-	0.0667 (0.426)
Age	0.0017 (0.1315)	-	-	0.0015 (0.4132)	0.0016 (0.3506)
Marital Status	-0.0057 (0.8168)	-	-	-.0.0060 (0.8098)	-0.0076 (-0.7612)
Divorce Status	0.0198 (0.6448)	-	-	0.0198 (0.6483)	0.022 (0.6067)
Motherhood	0.0210 (0.4086)	-	-	0.0207 (0.8867)	0.0053 (0.8324)
Adjusted R Square	-0.0075	0.0229	0.1533	-0.0186	0.0512
N	96	112	112	96	96

*Note: Significance levels: *** < .01; ** < .05; * < .10*

Table v. Regression Results for Vote Ratio (Republicans)

	(13)	*(14)*	*(15)*	*(16)*	*(17)*
Coefficient	0.8055*** (0.0000)	1.0354*** (0.0000)	0.9876*** (0.0000)	1.0885*** (0.0000)	1.0157*** (0.000)
Seat Status	0.0224 (0.3501)	-0.0287 (0.3061)	-0.0271 (0.7772)	-0.0207 (0.4453)	-0.0210 (0.4555)
White	-	-0.0465** (0.0281)	-	-0.0823*** (0.0005)	-
Asian/Pacific Islander	-	-	0.1049** (0.0178)	-	0.1268** (0.0458)
Black	-	-	0.0795*** (0.0030)	-	0.1268*** (0.0043)
Middle Eastern/North African	-	-	0.0000 (ERROR)	-	0.0000 (ERROR)
Hispanic/Latina	-	-	0.0299 (ERROR)	-	0.0716 (ERROR)
Multi-Racial	-	-	0.1865*** (0.0026)	-	0.0000 (ERROR)
Native American/Native Alaskan	-	-	0.0431 (0.6078)	-	0.0324 (ERROR)
Age	0.0017 (0.1315)	-	-	-0.0013 (0.2333)	-0.0014 (0.2152)
Marital Status	-0.0057 (0.8168)	-	-	0.0065 (0.8130)	0.0004 (0.9902)
Divorce Status	0.0198 (0.6448)	-	-	-0.0044 (0.9272)	-0.0064 (0.9003)
Motherhood	0.0210 (0.4086)	-	-	0.0466 (0.1135)	0.0486 (0.1205)
Adjusted R Square	0.1954	0.0392	0.1955	0.1377	0.0813
N	83	83	83	64	64

Note: Significance levels: ∗∗∗ < .01; ∗∗ < .05; ∗ < .10

As can be seen in Table v, Excel produced #NUM! (ERROR) for the p-values of some variables. This is a clear indication that some sort of error occurred within the data set that is keeping Excel from computing the p-values. An assumption can be made that the sample size was too small for the number of variables being tested.

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