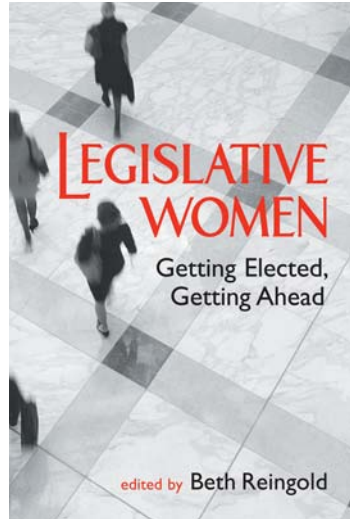


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edited by
Beth Reingold

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Understanding the Complex World of Women in US Politics

BETH REINGOLD

AS I WRITE (in January of 2008), Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton is making a historic run for the Democratic presidential nomination as the first female front-runner. Her early lead in the polls as well as her upset victory in the New Hampshire primary have been attributed to her strong support among women.¹ All the other Democratic nominees have been scrambling to compete for women's votes and campaign contributions. Meanwhile, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) is presiding over the US House of Representatives as the first female Speaker. Of the record 86 women serving in Congress, 20 members, or 23 percent, are women of color.² Eight women serve as governor of their state, 10 as lieutenant governor. Over 1,700 women, 20 percent of whom are women of color, serve in state legislatures across the nation; in 13 state legislatures, women make up over 30 percent of the membership. Are women truly "in" politics now? What does it mean and what does it take for women to be truly "in" elite political positions and institutions?

Offering new insight into the meaning of "women *in* politics," each chapter of *Legislative Women* contemplates the changing and increasingly complex array of opportunities and challenges facing women today—as voters, candidates, and public officials. The research presented here, like the research that preceded it, focuses primarily on *legislative* women—women getting elected to and getting ahead in Congress and state legislatures. Yet it speaks to the experiences of women in US politics more generally. At the very least, our studies of legislative women raise interesting and important questions about executive women, judicial women, and women active in local politics. We hope the chapters that follow will help inspire—and equip—a new, expanded wave of research on women in all their diversity, across all political institutions, and at every level of US politics.

To introduce and frame the research collected in this volume, this chapter offers a brief history of both the events and scholarly research surrounding and involving women in US politics in recent decades. Beginning with the heady days of the 1992 Year of the Woman, both the “real” world of political women and our understanding of that world have changed in similar ways. Women truly “in” politics and studies of women in politics have grown in number and complexity. As a result, the Year of the Woman moniker, in all its singularity, has grown increasingly problematic. As this volume demonstrates, there is no singular, quintessential, or universal woman in politics, and there is no singular, quintessential year, or political context, in which women seek and exercise power. The experiences of women in US politics no doubt are gendered—profoundly shaped by social, political, and institutional biases, norms, and practices that constitute our shared notions of what is or should be “feminine” and “female” or “masculine” and “male.” But as political scientists explore the dynamics of gender and politics, we are becoming increasingly aware that women in politics experience gender in many different ways.

The Year of the Woman

The 1992 Year of the Woman campaign season was quite remarkable. That was the year when the task of getting women into political office seemed most pressing and most promising. Record numbers of women ran for and won elective office. Most notably, the percentage of women in Congress almost doubled (from 6% to 10%) as their numbers increased from 32 just prior to the 1992 elections to 54. Women contributed to women’s election campaigns in record numbers (Wilcox 1994, 10–11). EMILY’s List and other political action committees (PACs) devoted to supporting female candidates shattered records for campaign fund-raising (Nelson 1994). Women’s representation, or the lack thereof, was a prominent campaign issue. Numerous problems, from the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill sexual harassment debacle, to widespread political corruption, to the lack of affordable health care, seemed to be related to, or at least exacerbated by, the shortage of women in politics. “This is a year when the voters are very angry with the political establishment and politics as usual,” Lynn Yeakel declared when she won the Democratic nomination for one of Pennsylvania’s US Senate seats, “and women represent change.”³ Getting more—many more—women elected and appointed to high public office held much promise for a better future. Women in politics were going to change things; they were going to “make a difference”—for women, for women and children, for the entire country.

It turns out that 1992 also marked the beginning of a very optimistic and productive era for *research* on women in US politics. Of course, political scientists did not suddenly discover women in politics in 1992. Many of us had long been concerned about the limited opportunities and gendered biases confronting women trying to get their feet in the doors of political power. Many of us celebrated the few and slowly increasing numbers of women who managed to get in. But soon after 1992, we became increasingly confident that many of the hopes and achievements of the Year of the Woman were neither unfounded nor aberrant.

First, we were realizing that 1992 was not the only, or even the first, year in which female candidates enjoyed considerable—and equitable—success. Since at least the 1980s, women have managed to raise just as much money and garner just as many votes as their male counterparts (Burrell 1985, 1994, 2005; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997; Uhlaner and Schlozman 1986; see also, Chapter 2 in this volume).⁴ Women running as incumbents, like men running as incumbents, hardly ever lose; women running against incumbents, like men running against incumbents, hardly ever win; and women running in open seat races are just as competitive as men running in open seat races. Thus, what was so remarkable about the Year of the Woman elections was not really the success of female candidates, but the unprecedented number of open seats available—thanks to redistricting and scandals—and the unprecedented number of qualified, experienced women who seized the opportunity to run for them (Wilcox 1994).

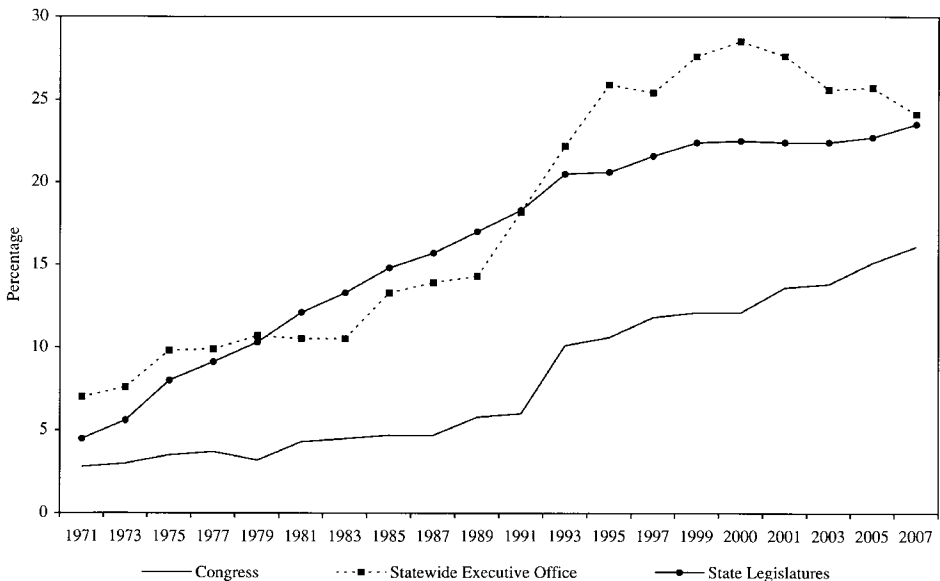
While political scientists were uncovering evidence of gender neutrality on the campaign trail, we were also accumulating evidence of significant gender gaps in the behavior of elected officials. By the end of the decade, we were confident that women in Congress and in state legislatures often do make a difference (Reingold 2008). They are more likely than their male colleagues to initiate, prioritize, and support policymaking that addresses a broad range of women's issues and interests, from feminist women's rights measures to more "traditional" social welfare legislation (e.g., Bratton and Haynie 1999; Burrell 1994; Diamond 1977; Dodson and Carroll 1991; J. Dolan 1997; Thomas 1994). Women even practice politics differently. They pay more attention to their constituents (e.g., Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Richardson and Freeman 1995; Thomas 1992), and their leadership styles tend to be more inclusive, more cooperative, less hierarchical, and less authoritative (e.g., Dodson and Carroll 1991; Jewell and Whicker 1994; Kathlene 1994; Rosenthal 1998). In all these ways, we could see a strong link between women's descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin 1967), that is, between being a woman in public office and acting on behalf of women and women's interests.

Beyond the Year of the Woman

Where do we stand today? What has happened since 1992? Overall, the numbers of women in public office have continued to increase (see Figure 1.1). Perhaps the most significant gains have been made in Congress, which has seen an increase of 10 women about every eight years since 1993. When the 110th Congress convened in January 2007, a total of 87 women were sworn in to the Senate and House, constituting 16 percent of all members of Congress. The percentage of statewide elective executive offices (e.g., governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state) held by women increased from 18.5 percent in 1992 to a record high of 28.5 percent in 2000; since then, the numbers and proportions have decreased slightly. Today, only 23.5 percent of those positions are held by women. The number of women currently serving in state legislatures (1,741) is at an all-time high, but since the late 1990s, there has been very little change in those numbers. Between 1999 and 2006, the proportion of women in state legislative office hovered at about 22 percent.

In almost every election cycle since 1992, observers have speculated about the possibility of another Year of the Woman. We look for the same

Figure 1.1 Women in US Elective Office



Source: CAWP, "National Information Bank on Women in Public Office" (New Brunswick, NJ: Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, various years).

conditions that were so conducive in 1992: lots of opportunities for newcomers to run competitive campaigns in open-seat races, anti-incumbent sentiment, salient “women’s” issues such as health care, education, and abortion. But each time, we seem to come up short. The 2002 election cycle, for example, was much anticipated for, like the 1992 elections, it coincided with the decennial redrawing of congressional and state legislative districts. But there were far fewer open seats available in 2002 than in 1992, and in the wake of the September 11 attacks, domestic women’s issues were overshadowed and incumbent support was high. As a result, the 2002 elections brought an increase of only one woman in Congress and a decrease in the number of women in state legislatures (from 1,682 to 1,654). At best, 2002 could be called the Year of the Woman Governor, for the number of women elected to the top state executive position had increased from five to a record seven.⁵ Again in 2006, conditions seemed ripe. In contrast to 2002, the “culture of corruption” in Washington, DC, was a regular news item; opposition to the Iraq war was growing rapidly, along with calls for more attention to domestic economic and social welfare issues; anti-incumbent sentiment was very strong; and Nancy Pelosi was poised to become the first female Speaker of the House. But because there were so few open seats available, 2006 was dubbed only a “mini” Year of the Woman (see Chapter 3 in this volume).⁶

It is not that the gains made in 1992 were not real or valuable. More women are in politics than ever before. And these women are here to stay, both literally and figuratively. In the words of one commentator, “Steady political gains by women are no longer big news. And that’s the big news.”⁷ We are looking at years of women (lots of women!) in politics, not just a year of the woman.

Yet we are still a long way from gender parity. Immediately after 1992, the rate by which the numbers of women in politics increased returned to its previous, slow pace (see Figure 1.1). It did not take long for observers to note, as Celinda Lake (a prominent Democratic pollster) did in 1996, that “the year of the 20-seat pick-up has given way to the prospect of many years ‘just slugging it out, seat by seat.’”⁸ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, there were signs that we could not even count on steady, incremental progress. As noted above and as seen in Figure 1.1, the proportions of women in statewide elective office and in state legislatures stopped increasing altogether. The charts were beginning to look an awful lot like glass ceilings. “We’re really kind of stuck,” observed Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.⁹ Even with the slight uptake following the 2006 election, it looks like it is going to take many years of many women struggling to gain a foothold in politics, not just one silver-bullet year of one figurative woman beating the odds.

As the first decade of the twenty-first century unfolds, the view from the political science literature appears more guarded as well. We too are realizing that the status of women in politics is much more complicated and contingent than we had hoped. We are learning, for example, that while winning elections is important, it is not everything. Equitable electoral outcomes tend to obscure the fact that too few women are choosing or being encouraged to run for office in the first place (Lawless and Fox 2005). State party leaders, who play a large role in recruiting new candidates, often underestimate the electoral viability of women (Sanbonmatsu 2006b); and the advent of term limits in over a dozen states seems to have done little to help (Carroll and Jenkins 2001). Female incumbents may be just as likely as male incumbents to win reelection, but recent research suggests they have to work a lot harder and raise even more money to do so (Green 2003; Palmer and Simon 2006; see also Chapter 2 in this volume).

Researchers have known for quite some time that those women who do run for public office almost always have to confront powerful gender stereotypes, not only about their viability, but also about their issue expertise (e.g., soft on crime, strong on education), political ideology (more liberal), and their character (e.g., more honest and compassionate, not as tough, knowledgeable, or decisive) (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Burrell 1994; K. Dolan 2004; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Kahn 1996; Koch 2000, 2002; Lawless 2004b; Leeper 1991; McDermott 1997; Sapiro 1981/1982; see also Chapter 4 in this volume). While it is not entirely clear whether these stereotypes help or hinder female candidates at the polls (K. Dolan 2008), there is some evidence suggesting that gender stereotypes may limit the kinds of offices women will pursue—channeling them toward positions that are either more “feminine” (e.g., state school superintendent) or less discretionary (e.g., county clerk) (Fox and Oxley 2003; Lublin and Brewer 2003).

Political scientists are also beginning to realize that “making a difference” for women and changing both the substance and style of policymaking may be a lot more difficult and complicated than we had hoped (Dodson 2006; Reingold 2000, 2008). Not all women in politics are able, or even willing, to act for women. Numerous studies of state legislators and members of Congress have found that liberal, Democratic women are more committed to women’s substantive representation than are conservative, Republican women, especially when women’s representation is defined as support for or advocacy of feminist policy initiatives (e.g., Evans 2005; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002; Wolbrecht 2002). A lot also depends on being in the right place at the right time—for example, being on relevant committees when your party, or the Democratic party, has majority control and when competition over women’s votes is intense (Dodson 2006; Hawkesworth et al. 2001; Norton 2002; Swers 2002).¹⁰ A women’s caucus with organizational resources and institutional clout also helps (Carroll

2001; Hawkesworth et al. 2001; Thomas 1994). Yet bipartisan consensus on what constitutes important women's issues, which is needed to forge a strong women's caucus, is not always assured. Even those female policy-makers who see themselves as representing women often have very different ideas about what representing women actually entails (Carroll 2002; Dodson 2006; Reingold 2000). In short, although the links between women's descriptive and substantive representation are strong, they are by no means guaranteed, automatic, universal, or uniform.

Underlying all these recent revelations about the complexity of women's experiences in politics is an emerging appreciation for the great diversity among women, especially those running for and occupying public office in recent decades. Most of these women are Democrats; the vast majority of them are white. Yet sizeable numbers of these women are Republicans who, like their male counterparts, are growing increasingly more conservative. And a good many are African American or Latina, all or most of whom are Democrats. Today, 29 percent of the women in Congress are Republican, as are 36 percent of statewide elected executive women and 31 percent of women in state legislatures. As mentioned earlier, 23 percent of the women currently serving in Congress are African American, Latina, or Asian American, as are 5 percent of those serving in statewide elective executive office and 20 percent of those serving in state legislatures. Yet, until recently, the partisan and racial makeup of women in elite US politics has received little attention, scholarly or otherwise.

Some media commentators and scholars noticed that the 1992 Year of the Woman was more like the "Year of the Democratic Woman" or the "Year of the Liberal Democratic Woman" since those women were the primary beneficiaries (Wilcox 1994, 2).¹¹ Others noted that Republican women made considerable gains in the 1994 elections, especially conservative Republican women in Congress.¹² But political scientists have only recently called attention to the fact that Republican women have been enjoying significantly fewer gains in electoral politics than have Democratic women and, as a result, the ratio of Democratic to Republican women in public office has been increasing (Fox 2006; King and Matland 2003; Sanbonmatsu 2006a; Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume). Some are uncovering evidence that gender *and* party interact in the processes of candidate recruitment and the patterns of candidate success such that the experiences of Democratic and Republican women may be fundamentally different (e.g., Koch 2002; Palmer and Simon 2006; Sanbonmatsu 2002a). As noted above, recent research also shows that, once in office, partisanship can play a significant role in determining whether and how women in office "make a difference" (see especially, Evans 2005).

Even fewer discussions of the Year of the Woman, or of women in US politics more generally, have noted the very significant increase in the num-

ber of African American women and Latinas running for and winning public office. Hardly anyone noticed, for example, that as a result of the 1992 elections, the number of women of color in Congress almost tripled, jumping from 5 in 1992 to 13 in 1993. Few noted that many of the 1992 open seat opportunities for women were in newly created majority-minority districts (Garcia Bedolla, Tate, and Wong 2005; Smooth 2006; Tate 2003). "For African American women," Wendy Smooth (2006, 137) writes, "1992 was also the 'Year of Redistricting.'" Since 1992 (and in some cases, even before), African American women and Latinas have continued to make dramatic gains in electoral politics, sometimes outpacing other women, African American men, and Latino men (Bositis 2001; Fraga et al. 2006). As a result, female legislators have become more racially and ethnically diverse, and gender diversity among African American and Latino legislators is higher than it is among white, Anglo legislators (at both the congressional and state levels) (Bratton, Haynie, and Reingold 2008; Fraga et al. 2006; Garcia Bedolla, Tate, and Wong 2005; Montoya, Hardy-Fanta, and Garcia 2000; Smooth 2006; Tate 2003).

Not surprisingly, political scientists are only beginning to consider how gender, race, and ethnicity may interact to determine and distinguish patterns of candidate recruitment, electoral success, and representative behavior. Nonetheless, we are learning that the relative success of women of color in electoral politics may be attributed to both favorable opportunity structures, such as new majority-minority districts, and a long history of women's activism and leadership in civil rights movements and community organizing (Darcy and Hadley 1988; Fraga et al. 2006; Garcia Bedolla, Tate, and Wong 2005; Moncrief, Thompson, and Schuhmann 1991; Montoya, Hardy-Fanta, and Garcia 2000; Smooth 2006; Takash 1997; Tate 2003). Recent research also suggests that, once in office, women of color may be uniquely situated to recognize and act upon demands for both racial/ethnic and gender representation, realizing that such diverse interests are more likely to be mutually reinforcing and interdependent than mutually exclusive and independent (Barrett 1995, 1997; Bratton, Haynie, and Reingold 2006; Carroll 2002; Garcia Bedolla, Tate, and Wong 2005).

Clearly we have a lot more to learn about this complex world of women in US politics. Thus, women-in-politics scholars have been digging deeper, so to speak, and contemplating somewhat different questions lately. In addition to asking whether gender matters, we have been asking: *How* does gender matter? Under what conditions might gender matter more or less than usual? And what else besides gender matters? And in addition to comparing the experiences of women to those of men in politics, more of us are wondering about the diversity *among* women and the varied experiences of women in politics. Of particular interest are the ways in which gender interacts with partisanship, ideology, race, and ethnicity to affect women's choices, goals, strategies, interactions, and accomplishments.

Outline of the Book

The chapters that follow address these very questions and speak to the very diverse experiences of women in US politics today. In doing so, they necessarily highlight the complexity of those experiences and the gender dynamics that shape them.

If women's prospects for winning elections look so good, why are there still so few women in public office?

Jennifer Lawless and Kathryn Pearson in Chapter 2 examine the possibility that the gender dynamics of primaries are partially to blame. As they point out, the research documenting women's electoral success has focused almost exclusively on their experiences as candidates in the *general* elections. What happens before that? Do the primaries, where multiple candidates compete for their party's nomination in the general election, weed out more than a fair share of female candidates?

Analyzing decades of congressional primary races and paying close attention to potential variation across parties, Lawless and Pearson are able to determine that Democratic and Republican women alike win primaries as often as their male counterparts do. Digging deeper, however, they also reveal that, despite these equitable outcomes, women's primary races are more competitive and, thus, more difficult than those involving only men. Whether they are incumbents, challengers, or open seat contestants, women running in congressional primaries face a more crowded field than their male counterparts do. Finally, Lawless and Pearson highlight yet another possible explanation for the continued shortage of female candidates in general elections: in recent years, women have become increasingly likely to challenge each other, both within their own party's primary and within the opposing party's primary.

The implications of all this are far-reaching, as Lawless and Pearson acknowledge. Faced with such a daunting task, many (more) women may opt out of the primary races altogether. Furthermore, if the women who compete in the general elections had to work harder and be stronger candidates to get there, then why aren't they *more* successful than the men who compete in general elections?

How do women candidates manage to raise so much money, and at what cost? To what degree and how do the political parties recruit and support women candidates?

In Chapter 3, Barbara Burrell takes a close, critical look at the fund-raising efforts of female candidates in the most recent (2006) congressional elections, as well as party activities on their behalf. As Burrell explains, party

support and money often go hand-in-hand: “How good candidates are at raising money and how much they can obtain or give themselves are the top two criteria for national party leaders in promoting candidacies” (p. 48 in this volume). Moreover, prodigious fund-raisers often become the party gatekeepers themselves. Success breeds success. In the 2006 congressional elections, this was no less true for women than it was for men. From the earliest days of the campaign season on, within both parties, and among incumbents, challengers, and open-seat candidates alike, women raised just as much money as men did—sometimes more. In part because of their own fund-raising ability and in part because of their leadership within the party fund-raising organizations, women running for Congress also received a great deal of financial support from their parties—more, in fact, than their male counterparts did.

While she finds that female candidates continue to be formidable fund-raisers who gain substantial support from their national party organizations, Burrell poses some intriguing questions about the implications of the contemporary stress on fund-raising prowess for the recruitment of future women candidates. As Burrell’s analysis of the 2006 congressional races shows, there remains a critical shortage of women running for even the most promising open seats available, especially among Republicans. Might the pressure to raise so much money be preventing (more) women from taking advantage of those opportunities? If so, Burrell argues, campaign finance reform is sorely needed. But the fact that women already in Congress have been so successfully integrated into the current campaign finance regime makes prospects for meaningful reform look even dimmer.

*To what degree and how are campaigns gendered?
Are some female candidates more likely than others to
“run as women”? And if so, why? What sorts of gender stereo-
types do they still encounter, and how do they deal with them?*

In Chapter 4, Dianne Bystrom reveals how female candidates in the most recent national and statewide elections are employing new media technologies and strategies to confront gender stereotypes and double standards still prevalent among voters and in the media. Her detailed analysis of candidates’ television advertisements and websites reveals that many women are embracing the stereotypes and running “as women”—emphasizing such issues as education and health care, for example. At the same time, however, women are just as likely and sometimes more likely to adopt certain “masculine” approaches, like running negative ads, attacking their opponents’ records, or emphasizing their own strength, toughness, and experience. Many candidates, female and male, seem to be taking a balanced approach, emphasizing both “feminine” and “masculine” issues, character

traits, and media styles. This balanced approach is particularly popular among winning candidates.

In the end, Bystrom concludes, campaign media strategies—in recent years, at least—are shaped as much by the current political context (which issues are most salient) and the medium (TV vs. the Web) as by gender or gender stereotypes. The balanced approach, which combines feminine and masculine themes in various ways, may be a particularly adept response to all the competing demands of politics, media, and gender. Running as a woman, or emphasizing feminine issues, traits, or styles, therefore, is a very strategic move, which candidates most likely adopt when conditions are favorable. And it is one of several ways women running for public office—from Hillary Clinton on down—can and do deal with gender stereotypes.

Do women's candidacies energize women in the electorate? If so, are some women's candidacies more energizing than others?

Chapter 5 by Kathleen Dolan and Chapter 6 by Atiya Stokes-Brown and Melissa Neal examine whether the symbolic “signals” of democratic openness, equality, and legitimacy suggested by the increasing presence of women running for high office have a mobilizing effect on women in the electorate.

Dolan employs survey data from 1990 to 2004 to examine whether voters, particularly female voters, who live in states and districts with a woman running for the US Senate or House of Representatives are more politically active, efficacious, and interested than those who have no opportunity to vote for (or against) a woman running for Congress. Her analysis also considers whether such “symbolic mobilization” accompanies all women candidates, or is instead contingent upon the idiosyncrasies of particular election seasons, the visibility of the office, the competitiveness of the race, or the political party of the candidate. Using similar survey data for 2002 and 2004, Stokes-Brown and Neal take a closer look at “symbolic mobilization” and the conditions under which it is more or less likely to occur. In particular, they investigate the possibility that the mobilizing effect of female candidates is enhanced when their campaigns focus on issues of concern to women. Emphasizing women’s issues may, in fact, be the mechanism by which female candidates mobilize women in the electorate.

Both studies offer unexpected results. Neither finds much evidence of widespread or systematic symbolic mobilization. In Dolan’s analysis, there are a few instances in which certain types of female candidates mobilize some voters in some races, but there are no clear patterns that would allow us to identify any conditions that promote or inhibit symbolic mobilization in any consistent fashion. In other words, the impact of female candidates appears infrequent and idiosyncratic. In Stokes-Brown and Neal’s analysis,

female candidates who run on women's issues do not do much more to mobilize women in the electorate, except to stimulate more discussion of politics. Interestingly, both studies find, contrary to expectations, that female candidates are just as likely to affect the political engagement of men. According to Stokes-Brown and Neal, for example, when female congressional candidates "run as women," men are apt to discuss politics *less* frequently.

Both studies conclude, therefore, on a cautionary note: if candidate gender works in such mysterious, complicated ways, then simplistic assumptions about gender politics may find little empirical support. Instead, we need to think harder about the various ways gender may be, in Stokes-Brown and Neal's words, "conditioned by external forces" (p. 112 in this volume).

Once in politics, why are some women more likely than others to act for women and women's interests? What does acting for women entail? Does it extend beyond "women's" issues?

Michele Swers, in Chapter 7, takes a close look at the relationship between sex, gender, and legislative activity surrounding the quintessential "men's" issues, national security and defense policy, in what is perhaps the quintessential men's club, the US Senate. In the post-9/11 world, these issues are preeminent concerns among voters and senators alike. Yet women in the Senate must face another, potentially conflicting imperative: powerful gender stereotypes that assume women lack expertise and strength on just such issues. For Democratic women, this problem is compounded by widespread perceptions that their party is weak on defense.

According to Swers's analysis of defense policy and her interviews with staff, women in the Senate are well aware of such stereotypes and work hard to overcome them—so hard, in fact, that their level of participation and their effectiveness on such issues are equal to those of their male colleagues. Nonetheless, the nature of their defense policy activity is distinctive. While female senators are just as active as others on "hard" issues concerning war and weaponry, they are significantly more likely to take the lead on "soft" issues concerning the quality of life for military personnel and their families—an approach congruent with their presumed expertise in social welfare policy.

Like the other chapters, Swers's research demonstrates both the power and the complexity of gender in US politics. Gender stereotypes about candidates' and lawmakers' policy concerns and issue expertise have a profound effect on women in the Senate. But that effect does not always translate into sex differences in representative behavior. As Swers illustrates, gendered activity can result in just the opposite: policymaking that appears,

on its face at least, no different for men and women. Once again, we have to dig deeper and think harder.

To what degree and under what conditions are women in public office able to “make a difference” and provide substantive representation for women?

Susan Carroll’s study of state legislators in Chapter 8 highlights the important role of committees and, more precisely, committee assignments, in understanding women’s policy-related behavior and their ability to pursue their policymaking goals. As Carroll points out, legislators may or may not get the committee assignments they really want. Given that “final decisions about committee assignments are made by legislative leaders, still predominantly men in most states, who can bring their own attitudes about gender differences to bear on their decisions,” female legislators may find that their own policy interests are not well served by their committee assignments (p. 135 in this volume). For example, women may prefer to serve on prestigious and powerful “money” committees (e.g., appropriations, ways and means), but gender stereotyping by legislative leaders might channel them into education, health, and human services committees instead. Conversely, women may be over- or well-represented on committees like education and health by choice—precisely because they want to make a difference for women.

Relying on 1988 and 2001 national surveys of state legislators, Carroll provides strong evidence that committee assignments can and do facilitate women’s efforts to make a difference on women’s issues. Regardless of race/ethnicity, party, or state political culture, female state legislators are more likely than their male colleagues to seek and obtain positions on committees dealing with education, health, and human services. Moreover, the women appear quite content with and interested in their work on these committees, for they are able to use those positions to advocate on behalf of women’s interests. Carroll’s research also assures us that, over the years, there is increasingly little evidence that women are being barred from the most powerful committees, which see their share of women’s interest legislation as well.

Who or what else do women in politics act for or on behalf of? How do they balance those interests? What sorts of coalitions do they bring together or join, and why?

In Chapter 9, Luis Fraga, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, Linda Lopez, and Ricardo Ramírez compare the attitudes and behavior of Latina and Latino state legislators to see how gender and ethnic representation interact. They theorize that Latina public officials “are uniquely positioned to leverage the intersec-

tionality of their ethnicity and gender,” effectively balance women’s interests and Latino interests, and reach across gender, ethnic, and racial lines to forge meaningful coalitions (p. 158 in this volume).

Once again, the findings and conclusions underscore the complexity of gender—and ethnic—politics in the United States. Contrary to most other studies of women’s political representation, Fraga and associates find almost no significant differences in the policy priorities of Latina and Latino state legislators. Both groups are equally concerned about education and health care. But when it comes to reaching out to others and building legislative coalitions, Latinas do exhibit a “multiple identity advantage” that allows them to work more frequently (than Latinos do) with members of other historically underrepresented groups. Most striking and interesting, though, are the choices Latina and Latino legislators make when confronted with hypothetical trade-offs between Latino interests, women’s interests, and constituent interests. Such choices are undoubtedly difficult and complicated (and perhaps infrequent), but Latinas do demonstrate a greater willingness to balance such competing interests, giving more weight to the women’s caucus position without neglecting the demands of either the Latino caucus or their constituents. In these ways, Fraga et al. conclude, Latina legislators may position themselves—strategically and intersectionally—as “the most effective advocates on behalf of working class communities of color” (p. 157 in this volume).

To what degree and under what conditions are women able to advance in their careers in politics? What enables some women to move up the ladder, exert leadership, and wield power and influence? And what prevents so many others from doing so?

The two chapters by Wendy Smooth (Chapter 10) and Cindy Simon Rosenthal (Chapter 11) illuminate both the new opportunities and old barriers women face as they seek power and influence within state legislatures and Congress (respectively). Legislative power, as Smooth explains, comes in many forms—formal and informal, positional and reputational. Regardless of which form it takes, power is key for any legislator who wants to make a difference. Yet, as Smooth’s in-depth study of African American women (and their colleagues) serving in the Georgia, Maryland, and Mississippi state legislatures vividly illustrates, access to power and influence is contingent upon both gender and race. Through various mechanisms, African American women in these legislatures are effectively shut out from both formal and informal positions of influence, despite their relatively large numbers, their seniority, and their formidable efforts to represent their constituents. State legislatures, Smooth concludes, have not adapted very well to the growing gender and racial diversity of their members, and women of color may be paying the highest price for this failure.

Rosenthal’s timely analysis of recent leadership elections in Congress

uncovers a new era in women's political incorporation, but also reveals considerable apprehension and ambivalence about women assuming such powerful positions. As Rosenthal points out, 2007 and the beginning of the 110th Congress might well have been dubbed the Year of the Woman Leader. In one of the most historic of women's "firsts" in US politics, Nancy Pelosi was elected Speaker of the House, the very top leadership position in Congress and one of the most powerful positions in the nation. Overall, women in the 110th Congress have gained more party and committee leadership positions than ever before. Yet it is equally important to note that women have been contesting party leadership elections in Congress for quite some time. Rosenthal's analysis of those leadership elections shows just how important—and gendered—those elections are.

According to Rosenthal, when women run for congressional leadership positions, so do lots of other people. Since the 1990s, leadership races with women candidates have been more competitive than those involving only men; women candidates are less likely to run unopposed and, when running in contested elections, face more opponents on average. Moreover, until quite recently, women in Congress, like "tokens" in general, tended to gain only "less powerful or specially designated" leadership positions, especially within the Republican hierarchy (p. 208 in this volume). Finally, Rosenthal's gender analysis of the media coverage of three of the most recent contested leadership elections (two involving Pelosi, one to replace Tom DeLay [R-TX]) suggests that women vying for the most powerful political positions in the country may be greeted with fascination, skepticism, and confusion. Given the "unspoken masculinity of Congress and its past leaders," women like Pelosi remain oddities (p. 218 in this volume).

Like the preceding chapters, these two chapters illustrate the need for and value of digging deeper and thinking harder. Both studies of gender and power go well beyond a cursory analysis of who is in what position—and for good reason. Smooth's research shows that, even when African American women do gain access to "positions that *traditionally* convey power," they often find their access to real power is still denied (p. 194 in this volume). Rosenthal's detailed analysis of leadership races, like Lawless and Pearson's analysis of primary races, demonstrates that power is not simply about who wins and who loses. It is also very much about who has to work harder to obtain victory by competing in a more crowded field and addressing the fears and misgivings spawned by gender stereotypes.

* * *

These chapters offer students and scholars alike a wide-ranging collection of research on women in US politics that is both cutting-edge and accessible. Every contributor breaks new ground. Lawless and Pearson are one of the very few who have investigated women's fortunes in congressional pri-

maries, and theirs is the most comprehensive and systematic analysis available. Burrell builds upon her path-breaking work on women's campaign fund-raising and party support in congressional elections by incorporating the most recent developments from the 2006 midterm elections. Similarly, Bystrom provides the most recent and thorough analysis of gendered political communication available, including insights into Hillary Clinton's historic run for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination. Dolan's findings on the mobilizing effects of women's political campaigns, as well as those of Stokes-Brown and Neal, challenge the tentative conclusions of this emerging field of inquiry. Swers's is one of the very few studies of women in the US Senate, and the first to examine women's legislative activity on defense and foreign policy issues. Carroll's work on the politics of women's committee positions in state legislatures is definitive, especially given its unprecedented reach across states and time. Fraga and associates are the first to examine in-depth the perspectives, choices, behavior, and strategic positioning of Latinas in public office; to date, theirs is the only survey of Latino/a state legislators available. Smooth provides an extraordinarily candid, eye-opening study of the intersections of gender, race, and power among public officials—a long neglected yet extremely important area of research. Rosenthal is the first to study, or even consider, the very gendered dynamics of congressional leadership selection.

The chapters employ a variety of methodological tools, from statistical analysis of large quantities of electoral data to in-depth, personal interviews with elected officials. They therefore illustrate quite vividly the many benefits of methodological pluralism and creativity. At the same time, each and every chapter remains accessible to interested readers of all kinds, regardless of the type or extent of their training in social science research methods. This is by design; from the very beginning, our goal was to reach out to an inclusive mix of scholars, practitioners, activists, and students of politics who possess a wide variety of analytical skills. In doing so, we hope our research will stimulate much discussion and debate, and raise many new, interesting questions for future research. Indeed, Karen O'Connor's concluding chapter (Chapter 12) does just that. It takes stock of what we have—and have not—learned from this collection and offers new questions and strategies for further research, all the while challenging us to think harder and dig deeper. The complex world of women in US politics and the ever-changing gender dynamics they face deserve no less.

Notes

1. Anne E. Kornblut and Matthew Mosk, "Clinton Owes Lead in Poll to Support from Women," *Washington Post*, 12 June 2007, sec. A; Jonathan Weisman

and Alec MacGillis, "Clinton's Campaign in N.H. Touched Chord with Women," *Washington Post*, 10 January 2008, sec. A.

2. These figures do not include the three women who serve as Delegates to the House from Guam, the Virgin Islands, and Washington, DC; nor do they include Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-CA) who died on April 22, 2007. These and other statistics regarding the numbers and proportions of women in public office are provided by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), National Information Bank on Women in Public Office, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University.

3. Scott Shepard, "'We Embody Change': Angry Voters See Women as Their Salvation," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 April 1992, sec. A.

4. There is even some evidence from the most recent congressional elections that female candidates are raising slightly *more* money than are similarly situated male candidates (Burrell 2005 and in this volume; Fox 2006).

5. Adam Clymer, "In 2002, Woman's Place May Be the Statehouse," *New York Times*, 15 April 2002; Liz Marlantes, "Year of the Woman Governor?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 August 2002, sec. USA.

6. Linda Feldmann, "Wave of Women Candidates for Hill," *Christian Science Monitor*, 19 May 2006, sec. Opinion.

7. E. J. Dionne Jr., "Women on the March," *Washington Post*, 16 October 1998, sec. A.

8. Adam Nagourney, "A Good Year for Running: More Women, Fewer Causes," *New York Times*, 28 April 1996, sec. 4.

9. Susan Milligan, "Regression After 'Year of the Woman,'" *Boston Globe*, 30 January 2005, sec. National/Foreign.

10. It remains unclear whether having a lot of female colleagues makes women any more (or less) willing or able to act for women (Cammisa and Reingold 2004; Reingold 2008). Scholars are, in fact, becoming increasingly skeptical and critical of the "critical mass" theories underlying such expectations.

11. Catherine S. Manegold, "Women Advance in Politics by Evolution, Not Revolution," *New York Times*, 21 October 1992, sec. A.

12. Editorial, "Women Across Party Lines," *Washington Post*, 6 August 1995, sec. C.