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The Women of 2018:
The Pink Wave in the
US House Elections...
and Its Legacy in 2020

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1

The Women of 2018

“Women Make History in the 2018 Congressional Primary Elections”
—*CAWP 2018a*

“2018 Midterm Elections Lead to Historic Wins for Women”
—*Cooney 2018*

As these introductory headlines highlight, in 2018 women made historic advances running for and being elected to national and state office in the United States. Women are, however, still very much underrepresented in political leadership relative to their percentage of the population. In this book I tell the story of women’s quests for election to public office in 2018, paying particular attention to the women seeking to win a seat in the US House of Representatives where the historic nature of the election primarily occurred. Who were these women? Why did they run? What were their campaigns like and how did they succeed? Do the 2018 elections represent the emergence of a new phase of women’s electoral power that the 2020 election then built upon?

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, women are 51 percent of the US population, a majority. But they are far from a majority of this country’s elected officials. They are vastly underrepresented as US senators, US representatives, governors, and state legislators. No woman has ever been elected president or vice president. In 2017, twenty-three women were US senators, 23 percent of the Senate; eighty-seven women were US representatives, 20 percent of the US House. Six women were governors, 12 percent of the fifty state governors.

Women were 25.1 percent of state legislators. Only one woman had ever received a major party nomination for president, Hillary Clinton in 2016, who lost in a defeat that devastated many citizens, particularly women, who had high hopes for a major breakthrough in women's political leadership.

Rather than receding from heightened quests for public office after the 2016 election, more women than ever, 463, sought national election to the US House of Representatives in 2018, and 53 women sought a seat in the US Senate, including 13 incumbents. A record number of 61 women sought to be governor of their state. A record number of women also won nomination and election to state legislatures. The number of female nominees for state legislative office increased by 29 percent from 2016 to 2018, the largest percentage increase in women's state legislative nominations in the past two decades.

The headlines introducing this chapter highlight the story of women's candidacies in the 2018 elections. When that election was over and the 116th Congress was sworn in, CNN announced that "no Congress has ever looked like this. . . . The 116th Congress broke barriers before it even set foot in Washington. The faces of this new class reflect the nation's diversity in ways it has never seen before" (Foran and Mattingly 2019). The number and diversity of its new female members were the legislators who most prominently contributed to a distinctly new representative portrait of Congress in 2019.

The 2018 elections were remarkable for women's leadership in US politics. It was transformative in the number and diversity of female candidates and winners, although after all the ballots were counted, women would still remain substantially underrepresented in the highest elected offices in the United States. This book centers on describing the candidacies of the women who "threw their hat" in the ring to become US representatives in 2018. In answer to the questions posed in the first paragraph of this chapter, in the pages that follow, I describe the ways in which these female candidates were distinctive in their personhood, in the nature of their campaigns, their success rates, and how their victories contributed to the representational nature of Congress. Do the 2018 elections mark the beginning of a new era in women's political leadership in the United States?

More women than ever saw themselves as elected officials, and they did not hesitate to put themselves forward as candidates in the 2018 elections. Their candidacies highlighted that year's elections, not only in terms of their numbers, the traditional marker of an election being a "year of the woman" described below, but also in the character

and diversity of their campaigns, the intense media attention to the ways in which they were contesting the election, and their numerous success stories, especially upsetting incumbents in US House races. The portrait included more women of color than in previous electoral years, more lesbian and transgender candidates, and more female elected leaders with immigrant backgrounds. Notable also were the number of female candidates within both political parties who had had military and national security careers.

It was not just their numbers and diversity that made women's candidacies stand out in 2018, but the distinctive nature of their campaigns. After decades of being told how to look, how to sound, and how they should act, female candidates across the country challenged the traditional concept of female electability, proudly displaying, for example, their physical strengths in their campaign advertising that featured them boxing, mountain climbing, scuba diving, long-distance running (Schnell 2018a), and shooting guns and rifles. At the same time, they also prominently highlighted their motherhood status, which traditionally had been hidden or at least minimized on the campaign trail.

Their campaigns challenged conventional wisdom and long-standing political research findings on gender in US elections. In this introductory chapter I provide an overview of the dominant theoretical perspectives concerning women running for public office that political scientists have explored in past decades. This overview serves as a prelude to an analysis of the 2018 elections and what the events of that year signify, not only for political equality between men and women in public leadership, but the quality and nature of that leadership. It concludes with a look at how the 2020 election built on this quest for political leadership.

I start with a summary of what historical research has told us about women's emergence as political candidates, what the original 1992 Year of the Woman was really all about, and what the trends have been since that election as an introduction to the new "woman's year" in American politics in 2018. Subsequent chapters then turn to the ways in which female candidates engaged with the electoral process in 2018, making it an extraordinary and distinctive year for women's political leadership. The chapters undertake a robust descriptive survey of the female candidates seeking election to the US House and an assessment of these candidates' impact on electoral politics. By "robust," I mean a broad exploration of a variety of facets of these campaigns, relying primarily on qualitative data. But I also employ quantitative data on aspects of their campaigns and how their campaigns compared with that of male candidates. In order to provide an overall profile of these candidates and

their campaigns and the ways in which 2018 became a second “year of the woman,” much of the material presented in this work is qualitative in nature. We also need to reflect on the extent to which a “year of the woman” frame is limiting and whether the concept of “gender vulnerability” regarding women’s candidacies is outdated. The story presented here should engage scholars in the development of the testing of hypotheses and theories in a new wave of research on women’s political leadership as well as giving readers much to contemplate about women in the contemporary political life of the United States.

The Historical Research on Women and Elected Office

A rich political science literature developed over many decades now exists, exploring women’s quests for political leadership and the barriers that have existed to their emergence and success as candidates for elected office. One of the first, if not *the* first academic accounting of women’s quests for political leadership in the United States was Martin Gruberg’s *Women in American Politics: An Assessment and Source Book*, published in 1968. In this work, Gruberg asked, “Where on the political power scale do women stand today as voters, as interest group members, as party members, as governmental officials? Do they have parity with men, competing as equals for any and all offices and objectives? Are there times and places at which they enjoy certain success, having a monopoly of rewards or exercising dominant authority?” After answering these questions through a compilation of the identities of the female officials elected and appointed to political leadership positions, he concluded that the record showed that “by and large, women have been fated to dwell in relative obscurity, accused of a lack of political interest or drive, and rebuffed into almost complete ineffectiveness” (v).

In 1971, fifty years ago, Rutgers University created the Center for American Women in Politics (CAWP) to chronicle the numbers of women running for and being elected to public office in the United States. It continues today as the leading source of scholarly research and data about American women’s political participation. As one of its first undertakings in 1972, the center ran a conference with fifty female state senators and representatives. Scholar and later UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick compiled data from that conference into one of the first empirical studies of women in elected office, published as *Political Woman* in 1976. Her research goal was to determine whether the obsta-

cles women were assumed to face in entering politics, in competing for higher office, and in functioning successfully as politicians differed in degree or in kind from the problems that aspiring male politicians faced (ix). She concluded that the women in her study were “remarkable not only because they have gained entry into a ‘man’s world’ and made a place for themselves in it but also because they manage to harmonize their political roles with conventional women’s roles. Refusing to choose between ‘women’s’ roles and participation in the ‘man’s’ world of politics they have worked out successful combinations” (239).

While Kirkpatrick focused on women who had already won public office, a few years later in 1981, Ruth Mandel, then executive director of CAWP, published *In the Running: The New Woman Candidate* that examined women’s experiences as candidates for elective office. She concluded that “in political life women’s success [was] in transition” (250) and that their increased numbers as elected officials was making a difference in public policy.¹

These early research efforts only studied women in elected office. They were not comparative analyses of gender in political leadership. In the decades since these studies were published, a substantial subfield of study on women and politics and gender in politics has developed, political science research that now extends from explorations of women as voters and citizen activists to women as public policy makers, public administrators, and judges, and the differences that exist between male and female candidates on the campaign trail.

Regarding women’s candidacies for elected office, researchers have explored a variety of theories and hypotheses about many aspects of women’s political candidacies, principally focusing on what factors account for their long-standing and contemporary underrepresentation in political office, why more women have not sought elected office in large numbers, and what has happened when they have been office-seekers. Research designs involving surveys, interviews, experiments, content analysis, and campaign election and finance data have all been employed in seeking answers to these questions and exploring them from a gender lens comparing the experiences of male and female candidates.

Research questions centering on the *supply* of female candidates, that is, why more women have not run for elected office, and questions centering on the *demand* for female candidates, that is, why they have not been recruited in greater numbers as candidates for elected office, have structured much of political science’s intrigue with understanding the main factors that have been the cause of women’s underrepresentation in elected office.

Supply-side explanations focus on factors that affect women's interest in pursuing political office, such as lack of self-confidence, the "second shift" of household work, and gender role socialization that might draw women into less competitive career paths. Demand-side explanations stress factors in the political system that limit women's opportunities to pursue political office, in particular less frequently recruiting women due to stereotypes and discrimination against them stemming from ideas about their gender, often referred to as "gender vulnerability." (See, for example, Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2019.)

In addition, researchers have asked whether women campaign in a distinct way from male candidates and how voters have viewed female candidates. The next section of this chapter highlights the various research efforts in these different domains with an emphasis on the most recent findings. They serve as backdrops to the focus of this book, which centers on who the female candidates were and how their campaigns contributed to making 2018 such a distinctive election year.

In my own career researching women's quests for elective office I have explored three major conventional wisdom ideas about the disparity between men's and women's quests for political leadership. First, conventional wisdom had suggested that female candidates and their election to national office suffered primarily from voter discrimination against them. Voters were less likely to support a female candidate compared to a male candidate it was believed. Second, political party organizations recruited women primarily as "sacrificial lambs" in races in which a political party had little chance of winning. Third, when they did run, women were deficient in acquiring financial support for their campaigns. These research findings over three decades have shown that women's experiences on the campaign trail have belied these conventional wisdom ideas (1994, 2014).

The research of multiple scholars since the famous 1992 Year of the Woman election has even produced a new conventional wisdom idea: "When women run, women win." In addition to my own work, other contemporary studies have tended to show that after accounting for partisanship and incumbency, women and men are equally likely to win elections. Seltzer et al.'s 1997 study *Sex as a Variable: Women as Candidates and Voters in US Elections*, and the various works of Palmer and Simon (2008, 2012) are especially notable in this regard. More recently, scholar Deborah Brooks in her 2013 book, which presented the results of her experimental study of gender stereotyping, titled the conclusion, "A Bright Day for Women Who Decide to Run for Office" (164).

Scholars have researched a number of refined questions about women's entrance into elections for public office, that is "throwing their hat" into the ring, being recruited to run, and their experiences on the campaign trail relative to men's, digging deeply into nuanced aspects of their respective challenges in contemporary times. What follows in this chapter is first an overview of the US electoral system and its impact on women being elected to public office. This overview is then followed by a perusal of the research into different aspects of the campaign process, political ambition, candidate gender stereotyping, political communication, and campaign fundraising, in which I emphasize the most recent findings, most of which suggest that women seeking elected office are no longer at a disadvantage relative to male candidates and office holders. This review serves as an introduction to the study of women's candidacies in the 2018 elections. To place their candidacies in historical context, I end this chapter with a description of the features of the 1992 election that resulted in it being characterized as the Year of the Woman and provide an overview of trends since that election prior to 2018 regarding the election of women to the US House of Representatives.

The Structure of US Elections and Women's Presence as Political Candidates

While much research shows contemporary women to be capable and successful candidates for elected office, the long-term structural factors of US elections exert a strong negative impact on the ability of new groups to achieve political leadership equality with the dominant group of white males. The United States lags far behind other nations in the percentage of its national parliamentarians who are women. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), located in Geneva, Switzerland, tracks and maintains a database on the number and percentage of women in national parliaments. In its November 2018 accounting just prior to the results of the midterm election, the United States ranked 103rd among national parliaments in the percentage of its members who were women (19.6 percent of the US House). Not all of these nations are parliamentary democracies, however. Of the subset of 125 countries Freedom House characterizes as electoral democracies, the United States ranked 73rd in the percentage of its parliament who were women.² The structure of its elections exerts a strong drag on women in the United States being able to increase female membership in national elective office.

Electoral structures consist of such factors as the rules by which candidates get their names on the ballot, the role of party organizations in the electoral process, the votes it takes to win, and how many candidates for whom voters can cast ballots. The single-member district electoral structure in the United States, often referred to as first past the post (FPTP), is the *least* conducive system to the election of women from a comparative electoral structure standpoint. In this electoral structure, not only do voters cast only one vote for a candidate in what are called single-member districts, but each political party competing in a district nominates only one candidate in a winner-take-all style of election. That means it is impossible for them to present a balanced slate based on sex because they have only one nominee to put forth in each district.

In contrast, proportional representation systems, common in many other democratic countries, tend to use multimember districts. Instead of electing one person in each district, several people are elected. The basic principles underlying proportional representation elections are that all voters deserve representation and that all political groups in society deserve to be represented in legislatures in proportion to their strength in the electorate. In other words, everyone should have the right to fair representation.

Proportional representation systems divide up the seats in these multimember districts according to the proportion of votes received by the various parties or groups running candidates. Thus, for example, if the candidates of a party win 40 percent of the vote in a ten-member district, they receive four of the ten seats, or 40 percent of the seats. If another party wins 20 percent of the vote, they get two seats, and so on. In such systems it is easier for parties to put forth a group of candidates including both men and women rather than just one candidate,³ but it is important that female candidates are represented equally within the lists and not allocated to lower slots.

Some parliamentary systems are also constructed with quotas for female representation or have seats reserved for female members. The core idea behind quota systems is to recruit more than a few token women and to ensure that women are well represented in political life.

Adoption of quotas for female lawmakers in many countries since the 1990s is a direct attempt at addressing the problem of underrepresentation. An extensive literature review finds that quotas generally have positive effects on attention to women's issues, the number of women in the legislature (at least initially), and other outcomes (for a review, see O'Brien and Rickne 2016). However, quotas' effects may not always be normatively positive. Increases in the presence of women

in politics can also lead to backlash or problems with coordinating policy agendas as women begin to assert more political power (Kanthak and Krause 2012).

An additional limiting factor for greater numerical representation for women in elected office in the United States has been that contemporary congressional elections, and particularly primary elections for those seats, have become “candidate-centered” affairs. Candidates tend to be entrepreneurs who build their own personal followings. They construct their own linkages to political party organizations and their platforms and develop other support networks. Party organizations tend not to choose nominees. They seldom provide resources in primary campaigns. To compete, candidates must raise money, develop coalitions of support, create their own campaign organizations, and construct campaign strategies. Most all candidates, regardless of sex, face hurdles in emerging as viable candidates in such an entrepreneurial environment, but this candidate-centered system in the United States seems to have posed greater challenges for women than for men.

Incumbents, historically mostly men, are advantaged in such a system and typically get reelected. This system limits opportunities for new office-seekers to win office. In particular, given the limited number of open seats, opportunities for women to advance their numbers as elected officials, even if they have substantial financial backing, have been minimal. Even with a substantial increase in the number of female candidates for the US House of Representatives in the 2018 midterm election and their strong campaigns, women in 2019 still only made up slightly less than one-quarter of its membership in the 116th Congress (2019–2020). These structural challenges are important and must be considered when assessing women’s quests for political leadership. Researchers must not just focus on female candidates’ deficiencies. Chapter 3 explores this structural problem in more depth as it pertains to the presence and experience of female candidates in elections to the US House in 2018.

The Political Ambition of Men and Women

Ambition theory has long dominated political science thinking on the process of candidate emergence for public office. This theory centers on the idea that political leaders are individuals who had a long-standing interest in public life that preceded their election to public office. When the opportunity presented itself to seek elected office under the right

conditions, these individuals became candidates (e.g., Schlesinger 1966). They were inclined to act in their quest for political leadership.

Strategic politicians have been described as skillful, resourceful, and articulate individuals. They tend to present an appealing physical and temperamental presence. They run effective campaigns, carefully selecting relevant issues upon which to capitalize. They tend to have extensive and diverse networks of friends and supporters and have the means to substantially finance a political campaign (Gertzog 2002: 103). Female candidates have increasingly adopted the characteristics of strategic politicians, scholars have found. Political scientist Irwin Gertzog has described contemporary female members of Congress as ambitious, experienced, rational, and skillful. They tend to be similar to men in their electability and in their campaign strategies and techniques. As strategic candidates, they carefully consider the chances of securing their party's nomination. Their entry into a race is based on the likelihood of success (2002).

But some contemporary scholars of ambition and the candidate emergence process, particularly political scientists interested in exploring the distinctiveness of women's quests for political leadership, now see that other frameworks beyond a pure ambition model help explain how individuals decide to seek public office. Significantly in this genre, Susan Carroll and Kira Sanbonmatsu, in their study of male and female state legislators, have suggested "that the process of candidate recruitment, in which potential candidates are approached and encouraged to run, can create candidates from individuals who had never before contemplated running for office" (2013: 42).

In addition to recruitment being the stimulating factor, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu have speculated that "a community concern or issue may attract a citizen's attention, spur activism and eventually lead to a quest for elective office although a political candidacy was not something this citizen had previously considered" (2013: 42). Their study of gender in state legislators' decisions to seek elective office in both 1981 and 2008 showed that "a traditional model of ambition, in which candidacy is self-initiated offers a less adequate account of how women reach office than of how men do so" (42). They offer an alternative model of candidacy which seems to apply more often to women than to men, one that recognizes running for office as a "relationally embedded" decision rather than a purely ambitious one. They explain that a relationally embedded decisionmaking process involves the beliefs and reactions, both real and perceived, of other people and involves considerations of how candidacy and office would affect the lives of others with whom the potential candidate has close relationships (45).

Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) asked their state legislative respondents about their initial decision to run for office to empirically test this hypothesis. Respondents were asked to choose from a three-part question about whether the decision to run was entirely their own idea, whether they had already thought seriously about running when someone else suggested it, or they had not seriously thought about running until someone else suggested it. Their female respondents were much more likely than the male respondents to be pure recruits and much less likely to be “self-starters” (49). Reflecting on female candidates and the 2018 elections, the Center on American Women and Politics concluded in its review that there was no single story about why women ran in 2018 (Dittmar 2019).

A second major question regarding women, political ambition, and the quest for political leadership has centered on whether men and women express different levels of political ambition. Research has suggested that women are significantly less likely than men to be interested in running for office. The studies of Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox have led this line of research.

“Have you ever thought about running for any public office—that is, any office at the local, state or federal level? Has it ever crossed your mind?” were questions Lawless and Fox asked a national survey of well-educated, well-credentialed professional men and women in their pioneering research published in their *Citizen Political Ambition Study*. Their findings were first published in 2005 with a replication study in 2010. Their findings have been of central importance to the broad understanding of women’s continued underrepresentation as elected officials in the United States. “Our empirical assessment reveals that despite similarities in levels of political participation, proximity, and interest, eligible women candidates are less politically ambitious than men. Women are not only less likely than men to consider running for office, but they are also less likely than men to enter actual political contests” (2010: 45). Lawless and Fox concluded that the critical finding of their research was “the presence of a pronounced and enduring gender gap in political ambition between professional men and women” (45). They determined three critical factors explained the gender gap in political ambition. First, women were significantly less likely than men to be encouraged to run for elected office. Second, women were significantly less likely to view themselves as qualified to run for office, even when they have had the same experience and credentials as men. Third, women were more likely to state they were responsible for the majority of childcare and household duties, and therefore did not have time to even think about running for office.

Lawless and Fox replicated their study of ambition among this pool of accomplished men and women a third time in 2017 in the midst of widespread anger among American women with the election of Donald Trump to the presidency and their worldwide marches the day after his inauguration (described in Chapter 2). Notably, and of particular interest to this study of women's candidacies in 2018, is that Lawless and Fox still found that "the overall gender gap in political ambition today doesn't look dramatically different than it has over the course of the last 15 years. This gender gap is nearly identical to the 16-point gender gap we uncovered in political ambition in studies of potential candidates from 2001 and 2011" (2017: 10).

Another lens exists from which to assess women's ambition to run for and hold elected office, one that focuses on the organizing of women's campaign groups to recruit and train women for political candidacies. While the "Trump effect" may not have produced more widespread expressions of political ambition among women in general, women's campaign organizations reported a sustained surge in women expressing interest in learning more about running for office and seeking training for a potential run as part of the "Trump effect." Stephanie Schriock, the president of EMILY's List, the preeminent women's campaign organization, was widely reported as noting that in the ten months before the election in 2016, approximately 1,000 women contacted her organization about running for office or getting involved in other ways. Since the election the number exploded to more than 22,000. "We have never seen anything like what we have seen over the last 12 months, if you could underline that four times, that's what I mean" (Tackett 2017).

Emerge America, a Democratic women's campaign organization that trains female candidates at the state level, reported an 87 percent increase in applications to its training programs in the months following the 2016 election. She Should Run, a nonpartisan organization that trains female candidates, said 15,000 women inquired about running for elected office, compared to about 900 during the same period the previous year (Gambino 2017). The ways in which such action might affect general survey findings of the lack of political ambition among women is an intriguing question. Exploring ambition from this organizational lens is significantly important to this study of women's candidacies in the 2018 elections that focuses on the subgroup of women who did get motivated (that is, had the ambition) to enter primary elections. For example, how did they describe their becoming candidates? What distinguished their "throwing their hat into the ring"? The comments cited above of the leaders of these cam-

paign groups spotlight the role that Donald Trump's election to the presidency played in stimulating women's political ambition.

Women's lagging ambition to run for elected office compared to men's ambition has also been noted to be related to the candidate recruitment process. Although comparison of men's and women's candidacies has shown that women have not run primarily as "sacrificial candidates" in contemporary times, contrary to earlier conventional wisdom, Lawless and Fox's surveys have shown that women are less likely to report having been recruited to run. The growth in women's campaign organizations noted in the previous paragraph may be altering that disparity. As I explore women's candidacies in the 2018 elections, the way in which and the extent to which these candidates note being recruited contributes to whether a new perspective on recruitment is emerging. The opportunity to participate in campaign organizations promoting women's candidacies provides a venue for women who have political interests and enhances their political ambition in ways that may not be reflected in general population studies.

The Financing of Women's Campaigns

The ability to finance a campaign for elected office, particularly at the state and national levels, is of prime consideration in decisions about whether to run. The cost of running for elected office is a major detriment to would-be elected leaders actually entering contests. Female candidates raise the same amount of money as male candidates in the aggregate, research has shown (Burrell 1994, 2014), but the general perception that raising money is harder for female candidates continues. Questions have been posed about how those women who have undertaken campaigns for national office have financed their runs compared to male candidates. For example, have female candidates been more dependent on small donations? Do they have to work harder to raise the same amount of money as male candidates? How helpful have women's campaign organizations become in the financing of female candidates' campaigns? These are all questions contemporary scholars have begun to explore.

Crespin and Deitz (2011), for example, asked whether it is possible that male and female candidates take different paths to achieve the same level of financial success. In their research, they investigated the composition of the congressional donor pool to male and female candidates

to address this question. They theorized that the perception has been that women have to rely on many small contributions while men are able to collect large donations.

For elections from 1994 through 2006, the Federal Elections Commission provided finance data at four levels of individual contribution categories: total individual contributions, contributions between \$200 and \$499, between \$500 and \$750, and \$750 or greater; Crespín and Deitz used these data to test the research question they had posed. They examined data for elections from 1998 through 2002. I have extended their analysis through 2006 (Burrell 2014). What both research investigations have found is that overall and within both the Democratic and Republican parties, female candidates raised more money on average across all of these large donor categories, and they acquired a greater average number of contributions in each of the categories than male candidates, dispelling even further conventional wisdom ideas of women being lackluster fundraisers.

Advocates and researchers have also turned their attention to women as financial contributors to political campaigns in general and to women candidates more specifically. This research, important as background to the 2018 elections phenomenon, has had two foci: women's engagement as campaign contributors and women's groups as campaign funders. The American National Election Study surveys have found that women report being less likely to engage in the political process by contributing money to candidates and party organizations than men, but both sexes have only a very small percentage of givers among the general public (Burrell 2014: 147).

Studies have also examined the relationship between sex and financial contributions among the pool of donors who contribute at least \$200 to federal candidates, the contribution level that mandates reporting to the Federal Elections Commission and thus available for public scrutiny. Working to get women to open their checkbooks for female candidates in 1992, former Texas governor Ann Richards challenged women at campaign rallies to consider that "for just one good pair of Ferragamo shoes you can write Barbara [Boxer] and Dianne [Feinstein] a check. Then pass up an Ellen Tracy jacket and give some more. Then an Anne Klein pair of pants" (Ayres 1992).

Getting women to open their purses and make online donations using their credit cards has been a major goal of women's PACs and other cheerleaders for female candidates. In 2007, the Women's Campaign Fund (WCF) importantly initiated a series of publications titled "Vote with Your Purse" playing on Ann Richards's call-out. Its efforts

have involved both advocacy and analysis. WCF wanted to find out why women were not giving more, how they could be stimulated to be more active donors, and how they might affect the financial resources of female candidates.

Over the course of several election cycles, WCF worked with the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) to analyze data on women as campaign donors of \$200 or more. The Center for Responsive Politics and Opensecrets.org have traced the donations to congressional candidates since the 2000 presidential election, which has allowed them to compare men's and women's giving in contemporary elections. In the 2006 election the WCF "Vote with Your Purse" study reported that women represented only 27 percent of individual direct money contributions to candidates, party committees, and political action committees (PACs) at the federal election level. They gave just 28 percent of single or combined contributions of \$1,000 or more and of the 778 US House races that the Federal Election Commission (FEC) tracked, only twenty-seven candidates raised the majority of their individual funds from women. When women did give, however, they prioritized female candidates relative to male donors. Women gave 30 percent of their dollars to female candidates; men gave female candidates just 17 percent of their dollars. Continuing this line of research, on Women's Equality Day, August 26, 2011, CRP issued a statement "that women have a long way to go until they see equality as political donors" (Beckel 2011).

Things are changing in this domain, however. Most notably, Hillary Clinton running for president in 2016 reported that 60 percent of her donors were women, an unprecedented figure. Across all categories of donors, Clinton was the first presidential candidate to ever have a predominance of female donors (Zhou 2016). In the 2018 midterm election, CRP reported a surge in female donations primarily to the advantage of Democrats, and particularly Democratic female candidates. Men continued to account for the majority of contributions to Democratic and Republican US House candidates, but women accounted for 31 percent, up from 28 percent in 2016 and 27 percent in 2000, the first year of their analyses. Women accounted for 44 percent of the contributions to Democratic women and 34 percent of the contributions to Democratic men, both historic highs according to the CRP. Women accounted for 28 percent of the contributions to Republican women and 23 percent of the contributions to Republican men (Bryner and Weber 2018). The center also reported that the number of women donating to federal candidates was surging in the run up to the 2018 elections, up by 182 percent, when compared with the 2016 cycle (Ackley 2017, 2018).

Gender Stereotyping in Contemporary Elections

The perusal of studies in the women and politics field highlighted so far has focused on the experiences of women as candidates, primarily becoming candidates and acquiring the financial support to undertake a successful campaign. A second significant group of studies about the role of gender in elective office-seeking has centered on questions of voters' perceptions of male and female candidates as political leaders. As noted above, based on election results in the contemporary era, voters do not appear to noticeably discriminate against female candidates, but they may have distinct perceptions about what female candidates bring to the electoral and policymaking process that researchers conceive of as "gender stereotyping."

A stereotype involves ascribing attributes to a group based on its demographic characteristics, such as race or sex, which may not necessarily be related to actual behavior. Stereotypes allow people to quickly and efficiently, if not accurately, make assumptions about the likely characteristics and behaviors of people. Gender stereotypes in the political realm seem to lead voters to have distinctive views of men and women. Thus, they evaluate them differently as political leaders. But, as with much else in the political world regarding women and political leadership, these stereotypes are lessening. Public attitudes about women's political leadership skills have shifted toward similarity with perspectives regarding male leaders' skills.

To assess gender stereotypes regarding electoral candidates and political leaders, survey organizations over the years have asked national samples of citizens to compare male and female candidates on a variety of personality traits and policy concerns. Were female candidates thought to be more compassionate and honest than male candidates, for instance? Were they more likely to be concerned with issues such as education and health care?

When Louis Harris and Associates polled Americans in 1972 on their attitudes toward women and politics, they found that the public had distinctly different ideas about the political competence of women and men in office. The public tended to judge a woman to be better at handling such issues as education, assisting the poor, and encouraging the arts, while they believed men would be better at directing the military, handling business and labor, and strengthening the economy (Sapiro 1981).

Many surveys exploring public attitudes have found that stereotyping of women to their detriment as elective office candidates has waned

over the decades. The data presented in the Pew Research Center's 2008 report "Who Is the Better Leader?" is a good example of contemporary attitudes. According to Pew's nationwide *Social and Demographic Trends* survey, "Americans believe women have the right stuff to be political leaders. When it comes to honesty, intelligence and a handful of other character traits they value highly in leaders, the public rates women superior to men" (Taylor 2008).

In addition to general public opinion surveys about perspectives on male and female elected office-seekers, political scientists have undertaken numerous experiments to assess underlying gender stereotypes through randomly presenting test groups with fictional male and female candidates engaging in similar behaviors and asking them to rate the candidates on different qualities. Political scientist Virginia Sapiro most prominently initiated this line of research with her 1981 article "If US Senator Baker Were a Woman: An Experimental Study of Candidate Images." Sapiro presented students in two introductory political science classes with a short portion of a speech. They were informed that it was part of a campaign speech a candidate for the US House of Representatives had given. (US Senator Howard Baker had actually entered this speech on the economy into the *Congressional Record*.)

Two forms of the questionnaire were distributed randomly in both classes with one identifying the candidate as John Leeds and the other identifying the candidate as Joan Leeds. After reading the speech, the students were asked to evaluate it and its content, to rate the candidate's competence in handling a range of issue areas, including a number which were not addressed at all in the text of the speech, to describe any image they may have on the candidate, and to state how likely it was that they would vote for the candidate. The results of her data analysis suggested that gender did provide a clue regarding evaluation of candidates for elected office. Her respondents had a lower expectation for a woman's success than a man's. Many different experimental designs have followed Sapiro's lead, with diverse groups of respondents comparing reactions to male and female candidacies exhibiting either similar leadership characteristics or engaged in similar political actions.

In 2013, Deborah Brooks published *He Runs, She Runs*, the most extensive experimental study undertaken to date to examine stereotyping and double standards among the American public regarding female candidates. Brooks employed an online national representative sample rather than depending on a nonrepresentative sample of respondents, such as college students, that lends greater external validity to her study.

The goal of her experiment was to assess whether people react differently to the behavior of male and female candidates who are otherwise the same. Did they employ a double standard? In this experiment, half of Brooks's sample read an article about a male political candidate and half read the same article about a female candidate. The behaviors included in her experiments involved displays of crying and anger, engaging in a gaffe, and projecting toughness. She also sought to determine whether baseline gender stereotypes remained static as candidates shifted from being political neophytes to being experienced politicians. She found what she describes as "a striking refutation of the conventional wisdom about double standards in campaigns" (2013: 4).

She reported:

[I do not find] any evidence that the public makes less favorable underlying assumptions about female candidates, nor do I find that the public has more challenging rules for the behavior of women on the campaign trail. My findings solve a puzzle that has vexed this field for decades: if stereotypes and double standards disproportionately hurt women candidates as the conventional wisdom posits, then how can we square this with findings that demonstrate that women receive vote shares that are comparable to those of similarly situated men? (2013: 4)

These experimental studies have been conducted with fictional candidates or general perceptions outside of real-world campaigns, limiting somewhat the conclusions we can make about double standards in actual political campaigns. A final piece of contemporary research presented here that has gone beyond experimental studies with fictional candidates to a survey of voters in an actual election is the work of scholar Kathleen Dolan. As she has stated, "Before we can conclude that gender stereotypes are an important influence on evaluating and voting for (or against) women candidates, we need to examine these situations. We need data that allow us to observe the gendered attitudes that people hold, their attitudes and behaviors toward candidates in real elections, and additional information about candidates and electoral situations beyond the sex of the candidates" (2014: 37).

Thus, in the 2010 election, Dolan surveyed voters regarding whether they thought eight characteristics better described male or female candidates or whether they did not think there was a difference. The characteristics were intelligence, honesty, decisiveness, being compassionate, can build consensus, can change the way government works, and has political experience. Questions of gender stereotyping were embedded in a national survey of voting behavior in the 2010 election.

On each of these traits, large majorities saw no difference between male and female candidates. For most of the issues, those respondents who did hold stereotypes, held them in the expected direction: women as more compassionate and men more decisive. Two exceptions were found. Women and men were equally likely to be able to build consensus and women were seen as more intelligent than men (2014: 64). Further, a majority of respondents believed that more women should be in elected office than was currently the case and that more women in office would be positive for our governing system. Abstract gender stereotypes had relatively limited influence on specific candidate evaluations. Instead, what mattered most in people's evaluation of candidates, women or men, were traditional political considerations such as political party, incumbency, and the amount of money campaigns spent. There was little evidence of "gender vulnerability" in her study.

Gender and Political Communication

The major area of research on women's quests for political leadership that is of substantial relevance to the distinctiveness of the 2018 elections centers on communications during the election season. Communication research from a gender perspective has had two foci: media attention to the campaigns of women and men, and presentation of men's and women's campaigns and candidate messaging, called videostyles. *Videostyle* is the term researchers have coined to describe candidates' presentation of self via political advertisements, composed of verbal and nonverbal messages and production techniques. Substantial research has been devoted to examining media coverage of women and men running for political offices. Aspects of comparative media coverage of male and female candidates that have been studied include the amount of coverage of their campaigns, issue coverage in terms of "men's" and "women's" issues, and images such as compassion and intelligence.

As Dianne Bystrom (2019) has summarized this research,

early studies examining the newspaper coverage of women candidates running for election in the 1980s found that this medium not only stereotyped female candidates by emphasizing feminine traits and issues, but also accorded them less coverage that often questioned their viability as candidates. However, beginning in the mid- to late 1990s and into the 21st century, women political candidates began to receive more equitable media coverage, both in terms of quantity and quality, when compared with male candidates. (xxxv)

In addition to research focused on media coverage of their campaigns, scholars have asked whether male and female candidates present themselves differently to the public in their campaign advertising. Turning to candidates' communication strategies, Bystrom has concluded that "research conducted over the past 35 years on the television ads of female and male political candidates running against each other for governor, the US Congress, and the Democratic nomination for president have shown that women and men are more similar than different in the tone of their messages, the issues mentioned, the image traits emphasized, and the nonverbal content included. . . . [T]hey are both drawn into a communication environment that favors a balance of feminine and masculine styles and strategies" (2019: xii).

The findings of three major contemporary studies of campaign communications substantially confirm Bystrom's conclusions about current videostyles of male and female candidates. Virginia Sapiro and her colleagues addressed the question of whether men and women presented themselves differently when running for office in their television advertising. They examined TV advertising in US House races in the 2000 and 2002 elections "to provide a much-needed comprehensive answer to the question, 'do gender differences exist?'" (2011: 108). Their data represented nearly the universe of ads run in competitive contests in those two elections. They believed that differences would most likely appear along four dimensions: casting and setting; policy issues; candidate traits; and tone and purpose. The results of their analysis led them to conclude that "straightforward gender differences in the presentation of candidates for national level office in the United States are extremely scarce" (116).

Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless (2016) conducted an in-depth study of hundreds of US House races focusing on campaign advertising and social media messaging from the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections. They concluded from their analysis of over 400,000 campaign ads and 50,000 social media messages

that men and women run virtually identical campaigns—the issues they talk about to words they use in their communications, or the personal traits they emphasize. Female candidates do not campaign in ways that attempt to take advantage of, or inoculate, themselves from gender stereotypes. Nor do male candidates' substantive campaign communications differ when their opponent is a woman. Instead, the main divergence in candidate messages stems from party affiliation, with Republicans and Democrats placing slightly more emphasis on different issues. (2016: 34)

In addition, they found that the media coverage male and female candidates receive reflects the similarities in their campaigns. Their analysis of more than 10,000 local newspaper articles revealed that

not only do male and female candidates get the same amount of coverage, but also the substance of that coverage is similar. Women are no more likely than men to receive coverage of their appearance, family or gender roles—in fact, this kind of media attention is exceedingly rare for any candidate. Female candidates are no more likely than men to be described as possessing “feminine” traits or less likely to be described as possessing “masculine” ones. And the issue coverage for male and female candidates does not differ. These patterns . . . emerge in part because men and women run virtually identical campaigns. (8, 61)

The third contemporary study of candidate communication is Kelly L. Winfrey and James M. Schnoebelen’s (2018) research on “Gender and Videostyle in 2016: Advertising in Mixed-Gender Races for the US House.” These two scholars examined the issues, the image characteristics, persuasive strategies, and production techniques in the candidates’ advertising to determine whether female and male candidates used similar or different approaches to appeal to voters in competitive races. They reported that their results across all these domains indicated “stark similarities in how male and female candidates approached their televised advertisement when campaigning for the US House of Representatives in 2016” (287).

Further, female candidates were shown to be adapting to gender stereotypes by discussing more conventionally masculine issues such as national security and the economy. These issue presentations did not come at the expense of their paying attention to discussing stereotypical feminine issues such as pay equity. Female candidates, they suggested, were taking a “gender-adaptive approach to their campaigns that [featured] elements of both masculine and feminine traits, issues, and production technique” (288). Male candidates were also found to include presentation of traditionally feminine topics such as a focus on senior citizens’ issues, while still presenting more masculine issues. Female candidates did differ significantly in one nonverbal element of videostyles. They tended to smile more in their ads while men looked “attentive/serious” (290).

This review of the wide-ranging research on candidate gender in contemporary elections overwhelmingly presents a picture of female candidates as primarily having overcome traditional perceived disadvantages on the campaign trail compared with male candidates. They seldom appear to suffer from a double bind. Gender disadvantages have been

mitigated. This book explores the 2018 elections as a harbinger of a new era for women seeking political leadership.

The 1992 Year of the Woman Election

In the 1992 presidential election, the number of women elected to the US House of Representatives increased from twenty-nine to forty-seven (10.8 percent of the membership) with twenty-four women being elected for the first time, making that election the historical Year of the Woman in media accounts. Prior to that time, the number of female members had only increased, if it increased at all, by less than five members with each election.

The 1992 election emerged as *the* Year of the Woman in US politics for a variety of reasons. Most prominent was the furor that erupted surrounding the unprecedented sexual harassment charges law professor Anita Hill brought against Clarence Thomas during his confirmation hearings to become a Supreme Court justice in October 1991. At first the Senate committee holding hearings on the Thomas nomination refused to give Hill a hearing. A contingent of female US House members then dramatically marched to the Capitol Room in the US Senate chambers where Democratic senators were holding their regular Tuesday caucus “to give them our view of what is going on in the country and to let them know that we believed the charges were serious—and in need of investigation” (Boxer 1994: 30). They were not allowed into the room to deliver their message and vented their anger at the all-male establishment.⁴ Hill finally was given an opportunity to testify, but members of the committee treated her harshly and Clarence Thomas was eventually confirmed as a member of the Supreme Court.

The National Women’s Political Caucus followed with a “What If” ad placed in the *New York Times* on October 25, 1991, featuring a drawing of the Senate Judiciary Committee grilling Justice Thomas under the title “What If? What if 14 women, instead of 14 men, had sat on the Judiciary Committee during the confirmation hearing of Clarence Thomas? Sound unfair? Just as unfair as 14 men and no women.” Further, the African American Women in Defense of Ourselves was organized immediately after Hill’s testimony. Among other efforts, they placed an open letter in the *New York Times* that included the names of 1,603 Black women. The letter was published on November 17, 1991. It denounced what they viewed as the racist and sexist treatment to which Hill had been subjected.

In addition to the catalyst of the Thomas Supreme Court nomination, several other features of the 1992 election cycle converged to ultimately make it an historic election year for women. First, there was a wave of public sentiment against incumbents emanating primarily from a US House banking scandal involving some longtime representatives who had repeatedly bounced checks at the members' bank. Second, the decennial reapportionment process created a substantial number of open and winnable seats in the US House of Representatives for newcomers. Fifty-two members retired. Retirements and the creation of new districts based on the census resulted in 91 of the 435 House seats being open in the 1992 general election. Third, issues of education, health care, and unemployment dominated in that election, issues in which women had been perceived as more competent than men. "The issues of the campaign, combined with an electorate interested in political change, resulted in increased votes for women candidates" (Wilcox 1994: 3). This combination of unique opportunities with a large pool of skilled female politicians eager to exploit them set the stage for this unprecedented surge in newly elected female representatives in the US House in the 1992 election.

In that election, the political parties were assertive in their efforts to recruit female candidates. Campaign staff members were directed to make special efforts to encourage female candidates although they did not appear to clear the field of primary competition for women. They did not discourage men from running against women or women from running against each other. But Federal Election Commission data on national party support of US House candidates in that election showed that both parties appeared to have contributed more money to nonincumbent female candidates than to male candidates (Biersack and Herrnson 1994).

Almost all the women who won new seats in the US House in 1992 and all the women winning seats in the Senate were Democrats. Some critics suggested that the 1992 election should not have been characterized as the "Year of the Woman," but a more apt description would have been the "Year of the Democratic Woman." The 1990 election had resulted in twenty-eight women serving as US representatives, nineteen Democrats and nine Republicans. At the end of the 1992 election, forty-seven women were US representatives, thirty-five Democrats and twelve Republicans. The "year" turned out to be a short-lived phenomenon, however, when the 1994 election became the "Year of the Angry White Male." Of the twenty-one female Democrats who were newly elected to the House in 1992, six lost their reelection bids in 1994.

Elections subsequent to the 1992 Year of the Woman have produced modest increases at best in women's membership in the US House, although commentators in some years would suggest that an election might produce another "year of the woman" in terms of increases in their numbers, only to be disappointed at the final outcome. (See Burrell 2014, for an overview of each of the elections following 1992 in terms of women's candidacies.) Sluggish rates of increase describe the rise in numbers of women being elected to the US House of Representatives since 1992 prior to the 2018 elections. The elections in the years since 1992 through 2016 returned to earlier election outcomes of the status quo of female representatives barely being maintained or just slowly inching upward and even decreasing in the 2010 and 2016 elections. In both of those elections the number of female representatives declined by one. The 2006 elections were exceptional in this time period, however, when twelve women were newly elected as representatives. At the end of the 115th Congress (2017–2018), eighty-four women were US representatives, sixty-one Democrats and twenty-three Republicans, comprising 19.3 percent of the House membership.⁵

As these numbers show, a growing partisan gap in female representation in contemporary elections has been notable. For most of the twentieth century, Republican and Democratic female representatives progressed in roughly parallel numbers in obtaining membership in Congress. In the 1990s, this equal representation started to change with the number of Democratic women winning seats significantly outpacing the number of Republican women winning seats. Democratic women have come to dramatically outnumber their Republican counterparts as state legislators too, generating a growing partisan imbalance in the female congressional pipeline. In addition, Democratic women are also more likely to be lawyers, educators, and activists, the pool from which candidacies are most likely to be drawn. As we will see in succeeding chapters, the 2018 elections greatly enhanced this partisan difference, leading to it being described as both "a pink wave" and a "blue wave."

Chapter Overviews

The research themes reviewed in this chapter—electoral structures, political ambition, recruitment, campaign financing, stereotyping, political communication, and the first "year of the woman" idea—are all touched upon as I explore the incredible story of women's candidacies

in the 2018 elections. Chapter 2 sets the national political focus on gender as being of central importance in the 2018 elections. It presents an overview of the 2017 anti-Trump Women’s March on January 21, 2017, and its aftermath in terms of women considering campaigns for public office; the #MeToo movement that emerged later that year that brought to political prominence widespread sexual harassment and assaults that women have experienced; and media stories that centered on women’s political leadership quests. The 2017 off-year state legislative election in Virginia provided an initial inkling as to what would positively transpire in 2018 for female candidates. In this chapter, I also provide an overview of media attention to the idea of 2018 being a real, new “year of the woman” and reflect on the limiting nature of this frame. Chapter 3 introduces the female challengers running for election to the US House of Representatives with a survey of those candidates’ demographic characteristics, their entrance into different types of races, challenger races and open seat elections, and their various success rates. The success rates of the nonincumbent female candidates are compared with those of male candidates.

Chapter 4 centers on the question of why they ran. It explores these candidates’ professed stimuli for running, the extent and the ways in which they were recruited to run, and the nature of those recruitment efforts. Chapter 5 then traces some of the very distinctive media messages of these female US House candidates, some rather shocking and quite daring. Chapter 6 explores the role of campaign financing in the 2018 elections. Chapter 7 profiles the 2018 winners and describes significant moments in their first year in office. Looking beyond the 2018 elections, Chapter 8 offers a sketch of the 2020 elections, reflecting on the ways in which women’s political leadership advanced by building on the historic nature of 2018. The chapter also calls attention to the 100-year history of women’s participation in the formal political life of the nation having won the vote in 1920 after over seventy years of petitioning for that right.

Notes

1. The methodology Mandel used in this study involved journalists following a set of campaigns and interviewing many of the actors engaged in them, as well as the candidates themselves. The journalists wrote reports after the 1976 election based on their coverage. These reports formed the basis for Mandel’s analysis.

2. Freedom House is a US-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights.

3. Visit FairVote.org for a detailed overview of representation systems. The concluding chapter of this book explores “ranked choice” voting as an alternative method to create fairer elections.

4. They were not let in because they were not senators. Only senators were admitted into this room, a Senate tradition.

5. For an historical perspective on the concept of “the Year of the Woman,” see Lynn Thulin’s “A Close Look at the Many Times We’ve Anointed ‘The Year of the Woman’ Before,” Slate, December 26, 2017, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2017/12/a-close-look-at-the-many-times-we-ve-anointed-the-year-of-the-woman-before.html>.