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The Political Glass Cliff: Potential Causes of Female Underrepresentation in the U.S. House of Representatives

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The Political Glass Cliff: How Seat Selection Contributes to the
Underperformance of Female Congresswomen

By

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“We’re half the people; we should be half the Congress”

-Jeannette Rankin, U.S. Representative

This project is dedicated to Jeannette Pickering Rankin, who became the first woman to be sworn into Congress in 1917. A hundred years later there is still a long way to go for representative equality, but it is thanks to women like her that we have come this far.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Tables	v
Figures	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Introduction	1
Literarture Review	3
Stereotypes of Female Leadership	3
The Glass Cliff Effect	7
Women in United States Political Parties	11
Gender Quotas.....	13
The Present Study	14
Method	18
Design and Procedure.....	18
Analytic Strategy	19
Results	20
Winnability.....	20
Electoral Success	22
Winnability’s Effect on Electoral Success	24
Discussion.....	27
Conclusions	28
Future Research	29
References	31

TABLES

Table 1: Estimated Means of Winnability.....	18
Table 2: Estimated Means of Electoral Success.....	20
Table 3: Estimated Means of Electoral Success Accounting for Winnability.....	23

FIGURES

Figure 1: US House Delegations after the 2006 General Election	12
Figure 2: 2008 Party Gains in the US House of Representatives	13
Figure 3: 2010 Party Gains in the US House of Representatives	13

ABSTRACT

The study of gender equality in leadership roles has for the majority of its history focused on the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. A new theory has recently emerged calling attention to the idea that women who attain leadership roles are set up in crisis or failure situations more often than their male counterparts. This is called the 'glass cliff theory' and over the past decade has been studied in the fields of business and politics. This research will discuss the leadership stereotypes that may affect women in these roles, and the evidence of the existence of the glass cliff. Regression analyses were conducted on the election results of 2006, 2008, and 2010 for any evidence that the seats pursued by female Republicans in the general elections were seen as more difficult to win than those pursued by their Democratic female counterparts. When controlling for the predicted winnability of a seat Republican women ran for more 'hopeless' seats than Democratic women, causing a significant impact on their electoral success compared to other groups. The difference between parties suggests that a glass cliff exists for Republican women but not for Democratic women. The remaining significant difference between Republican men and Republican women after controlling for winnability suggests that other factors play a larger impact on electoral success as an effect of gender. Winnability, however, it is a partial mediator of total gender effects. Legal or voluntary political gender quotas are discussed as a possible aid to increasing gender equality within the legislature. Future research is suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the past century evidence has shown that within American political and economic life women have been overcoming countless barriers and breaking through the proverbial 'glass ceiling.' Despite advances women continue to be underrepresented within these fields. In 2015 women made up only 19.9% of board of director members in Fortune 500 companies in the US.¹ Only 24 of these companies in 2015 had women CEOs.² According to data published by the United Kingdom's government in 2011 they estimate it will take over 70 years to achieve total gender equality within their top boardrooms.³ "In 2010 women made up only 12.5% of the members of the corporate boards of FTSE 100 companies. This was up from 9.4% in 2004. But the rate of increase is too slow."⁴

Following the 2016 national elections 19.4% of the US congress is comprised of women, with 21 women serving in the Senate and 83 in the House of Representative.⁵ As of the 2015 elections women make up 30.1% of the UK's House of Commons and 25.7% of the House of Lords.⁶ ⁷ Internationally Rwanda leads representation of women in national parliaments with 61.3%, closely followed by Bolivia and Cuba with 53.1% and

¹ Catalyst. *2015 Catalyst Census: Women and Men Board Directors*. (New York: Catalyst, 2015).

² Catalyst. *Women CEOs of the S&P 500*. (New York: Catalyst, March 01, 2017), accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500>.

³U.K. Parliament. Department for Business, Innovation, & Skills, Women on Boards, 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, 2011.

⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁵ Center for American Women and Politics. *Women in Elective Office 2017*. (Washington, D.C.: CAWP, 2017), accessed March 6, 2017. <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/women-elective-office-2017>.

⁶ U.K. Parliament, MP's, Lords, and Offices, 2015 to 2020 Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, 2017.

⁷ Ibid.

48.9% respectively.⁸ The United States is ranked 104th next to Madagascar and Tajikistan.⁹

Jeannette Pickering Rankin was selected in 1916 as the first woman to serve in the US Congress, representing Montana at large.¹⁰ As a suffragette and cofounder of the Women's Peace Party, the congresswoman spent most of her career pushing for the equal opportunity of women and emphasizing their role in peacemaking measures following both World Wars.

Today in the United States Congress women are fighting similar battles. Court cases and legislation continue to surface dealing with issues of affordable contraception and mandatory maternity leave. In the 2010 census it was recorded that over half (50.8%) of the US population is female, but even with legislation that deals so closely with women's issues they are still greatly underrepresented in the proceedings.

This study will seek to discuss possible barriers to women entering into legislative leadership roles through an archival study analyzing the congressional elections of 2006, 2008, and 2010 for evidence of the 'glass cliff effect' that has been observed within the United Kingdom.¹¹ Potential solutions for closing the representative gender gap will then be discussed in light of successful practices that have been implemented internationally.

⁸Inter-Parliamentary Union. *Women in National Parliaments: World Classification* (IPU, January 1, 2017), accessed March 7, 2017. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Rankin, Jeannette." In *Gale Encyclopedia of American Law*, 3rd ed., edited by Donna Batten, 251-253. Vol. 8. Detroit: Gale, 2010. *Gale Virtual Reference Library* (accessed January 14, 2017).

¹¹ Michelle K. Ryan, S. Alexander Haslam, and Clara Kulich, "Politics and the Glass Cliff: Evidence That Women are Preferentially Selected to Contest Hard-to-Win Seats," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34 (2010): 56-64.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stereotypes of Female Leaders

Leadership stereotyping has been thoroughly studied throughout most male dominated spheres. Studies on effective leadership show that those in positions of power must possess high amounts of consideration and structuring. While these can be witnessed equally among men and women, consideration is most often seen as a feminine attribute and structuring as a masculine one. Masculine traits are often seen as better leadership skills even if they are shared equally among men as women.¹² This equal distribution of traits not only raises the point that men and women are equally capable leaders, but also asks how we must go about reducing the stereotypes surrounding effective leadership to include more traditionally female associated traits. Researchers Eagly and Mladinic have looked into the idea of the “women-are-wonderful” effect being a hindrance to women in leadership positions.¹³ While women are more often seen as the kinder and more loving sex, and they are viewed as the better people to work with, they were not seen as effective leaders because their compassion may lead to a lack of assertion of power. Stereotypes that prove to be obstacles are not inherently negative, but still develop into prejudice when individuals cannot be seen as independent leaders.

Females are usually seen to be more emotional than their male counterparts.

This is particularly detrimental within leadership, where females must be aware of how

¹² Arnie Cann and William D. Siegfried, “Gender Stereotypes and Dimensions of Effective Leader Behaviour,” *Sex Roles* 23 (1990): 413-19.

¹³ Alice H. Eagly and Antonio Mladinic, “Are People Prejudiced Against Women? Some Answers from Research on Attitudes, Gender Stereotypes, and Judgment of Competence,” In W. Stroebe & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *European review of social psychology* 5 (1994): 1-35. New York, NY: Wiley.

much emotion they display and the types of emotions they display more than males in the same role, because of these stereotypes.¹⁴ Females are penalized when showing dominant traits such as anger or pride, or when showing little to no emotion because then they are seen as not fulfilling their “warm, communal role as women.”¹⁵ These stereotypes among females have been shown to impact productivity, goals, and attitudes of women in the workplace. Women are less likely to view their management skills positively because of workplace stereotypes, regardless of their legitimacy.¹⁶

When women belong to a minority they face a combination of gender related and ethnicity related biases. For African-American women this may include a culture of shame, and a tendency to assume an air of strength, showing that they do not need help.¹⁷ Female Asian Americans are not usually associated with taking strong political roles, and because of this gender and race outshine leadership skills when they actively participate within the political sphere.¹⁸ Realistically measuring the manifestation of these stereotypes within female political candidates is difficult. While women leaders are seen as lacking the traits that are traditionally prescribed to their male counterparts, they also are seen as lacking many traditionally female traits. Female politicians are facing increased discrimination because while they still cannot be seen as possessing

14 Victoria L. Brescoll, “Leading with their Hearts? How Gender Stereotypes of emotion lead to biased evaluations of female leaders,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 27 (2016): 415-28.

15 Ibid, 415.

16 Jennifer Flanagan, “Gender and the Workplace: The Impact of Stereotype Threat on Self-Assessment of Management Skills of Female Business Students,” *Advancing Women in Leadership* 35 (2015): 166-71.

17 Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, New Haven (2011): Yale University Press.

18 Tonia Bui, “Shaping the Mainstream as an Asian American Woman: Politics within Politics,” *Asian American Policy Review* 24 (2013): 24-30.

male leadership traits they also are seen as lacking the positive traits of females because of their vein of work.¹⁹

The election of a candidate depends mostly on the make up of the voting pool combined with the characteristics of the candidate themselves. Alexander and Anderson distributed surveys to voters during real and hypothetical election scenarios, and when information is not readily available about a candidate, voters rely more on a candidate's gender to associate them with leadership qualities. Incumbents were also rated more favorably across the board for leadership traits than those running against them.²⁰

The two parts of Burckmüller and Branscombe's business oriented study show that most people will predict female leadership being beneficial in the future if current male leadership is struggling. The second part showed that stereotypical female leadership styles applied to men were also desired in a crisis, where masculine traits applied to a female did not apply in the same way during times of prosperity as they did to traditional male leaders.²¹ It is important to see how stereotypical traits affect women being allowed into leadership roles, and that the time at which those traits are applied relevant to their perceived success.

The traditional think manager-think male has been shown to exist in most work areas involving leadership positions. Politics and business both show evidence that male leadership stereotypes exist, but those preferences change during crisis situations.

19 Monica C. Shneider and Angela L. Bos, "Measuring Stereotypes of Female Politicians," *Political Psychology* 2 (2014): 245-66.

20 Deborah Alexander and Kristi Andersen, "Gender as a Factor in the Attribution of Leadership Traits," *Political Research Quarterly* 46 (1993): 527-45.

21 Susanne Bruckmüller and Nyla R. Branscombe, "The Glass Cliff: When and Why Women Are Selected as Leaders in Crisis Contexts," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 49 (2010): 433-51.

“Women may be favored in times of poor performance, not because they are expected to improve the situation, but because they are seen to be good people managers and can take the blame for organizational failure.”²² It has been suggested that because of the perception of women being more creative and intuitive, they are seen to possess better management skills for risky circumstances.²³

Women filled fewer leadership roles when they were internally elected positions in a company, or from a large organization with many women at lower levels of management.²⁴ Diversity within the work environment has been seen as one of the best ways to combat many of these stereotypes, and allow women a larger percentage of leadership roles. Female leaders countered stereotypes their effectiveness when strong females are part of an individual’s, male’s or female’s, immediate in-group with which they have socialized, and when they encounter a higher frequency of interaction with multiple female leaders.²⁵

The lack of effective female leadership within politics fails to combat harmful stereotypes, causing a negative feedback loop.²⁶ Having more women within political spheres will help to allow more to follow, but with a very minor pool of prominent female personalities injecting women into the higher ranks of politics in equally

22 Michelle K. Ryan, S. Alexander Haslam, Metter D. Hersby, and Bongiorno, R, “Think Crisis-Think Female: Glass Cliffs and Contextual Variation in the Think Manager-Think Male Stereotype,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 96 (2011): 470.

23 Virginia Schein, “Relationships Between Sex Role Stereotypes and Requisite Management Characteristics Among Female Managers” *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60(1975), 340-344.

24 Amy Smith, “On the Edge of a Glass Cliff: Women in Leadership in Public Organizations,” *Public Administration Quarterly* 39(2015): 484-517.

25 Nilanjana Dasgupta and Shaki Asgari, “Seeing Is Believing: Exposure to Counterstereotypic Women Leaders and Its Effect On the Malleability of Automatic Gender Stereotyping,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 40 (2004): 642-58.

26 Ibid.

representative numbers is a daunting task. This barrier could be seen as part of the glass-ceiling phenomenon in male dominated governments. Women within government cite recent political successes as a positive indicator of the growth of gender equality within political parties.²⁷ The type of leadership skills possessed in reality by women minimally affected the opinions of employees, as opposed to male leaders if stereotypes were lessened. Bruckmüller and her colleague's previous research into when and why women are selected into leadership positions has been put to use in their later studies by finding practical ways to introduce women into leadership positions. Companies and organizations cannot solely rely on female and minority leadership in times of crisis, but must include wider changes to alleviate failing company policies. In cases that did not include larger policy changes the female leadership is unsuccessful. Companies are more likely to include female leadership if they establish gender quotas and publicly announce diversity goals.²⁸

Glass Cliff Effect

The glass cliff effect is a recently studied trend, that is a variation on the traditional glass ceiling as a possible explanation of gender representation gaps within the high powered fields of business and politics. The glass cliff is the idea that when women are put into high power roles they are more likely than their male counterparts to be set up for failure because of the risks associated with their position. Within business it is believed that women are more likely to be chosen to lead companies within crisis situations, and

²⁷ Kira Sanbonmatsu, and Inc ebrary, *Where women run: Gender and Party in the American States*. Ann Arbor (2006; 2010): University of Michigan Press, 123.

²⁸ Susanne Bruckmüller et al., "Beyond the Glass Ceiling: The Glass Cliff and Its Lessons for Organizational Policy," *Social Issues and Policy Review* 8 (2014): 202-32.

within politics they are put into candidacies that are seen as hopeless or impossible to win more often than men.²⁹

The first major question when viewing the glass cliff effect is whether or not there is indeed correlation, if not necessarily causation, between a business that is in jeopardy and which gender is preferentially selected to lead that business. Ryan and Haslam's 2005 study is one of their first attempts to show the statistical evidence that women are preferentially chosen for precarious leadership roles within business.³⁰ This research has slowly moved into the political sphere, but evidence of its existence is most strongly represented by the business academic literature. These two colleagues later looked more deeply into the prevailing dynamics and external factors that may lead this preferential selecting of women to happen.³¹ It is still unclear if political parties use women as sacrificial lambs in hopeless districts, or as last ditch effort to signal change to a lost constituency.

They observed that overcoming this requires both appropriate resources on the part of the disadvantaged group and a willingness of the advantaged group to leave the established order. These conditions make it very difficult to put forward systemic solutions to conquering the glass cliff. Researchers in two major areas have defined the circumstances that enable the glass cliff effect to occur. The first is that women are seen

29 Michelle K. Ryan, S. Alexander Haslam, and Clara Kulich, "Politics and the Glass Cliff: Evidence That Women are Preferentially Selected to Contest Hard-to-Win Seats," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34 (2010): 56-64.

30 Michelle K. Ryan, and S. Alexander Haslam, "The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions," *British Journal of Management* 15 (2005): 1-10.

31 Michelle K. Ryan, and S. Alexander Haslam, "The Glass Cliff: Exploring the Dynamics Surrounding Women's Appointment to Precarious Leadership Positions," *The Academy of Management Review* 32 (2007): 549-72.

as more suitable leaders when struggles and crisis are internal as opposed to external. If past leaders have performed poorly, causing the downfall of companies then subjects are much more likely to favor female leadership than if company failures can be attributed to outside factors such as economic drops. The second area studied indicated women are more likely to be chosen because they are a signal for change, while their individual leadership strengths may be set aside.³²

Because most management decisions are made within groups it is important to take into consideration group discussion. When test groups are presented with a male and female candidate, and a failing or succeeding company, their discussions related to leadership evolve to reflect the preferential discussion of men in succeeding roles and women in failing ones.³³

The majority of studies supporting the theory of the glass cliff effect have evolved in the business management arena. Very recently studies within United Kingdom politics have begun to exhibit the existence of the effect within their regional elections. While it has not thoroughly been studied in the United States, it may be found that if a glass cliff effect exists for congressional elections, it is aided by masculine leadership stereotypes, which discourage women from self-selecting into leadership positions within their party or district. When highly dominant women are shown a strong female leadership model they are more likely to take up a leadership role even

³² Clara Kulich, Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi, Vincenzo Iacoviello, Klea Faniko, and Michelle K. Ryan, "Signaling change during a crisis: Refining conditions for the glass cliff," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 61 (2015): 96-103.

³³ Joel T. Nadler and Sarah Bailey. "Group Discussions and the Glass Cliff Context: An Exploratory Study of Gender and Leadership." *North American Journal of Psychology* 17, (2015): 617-632.

within a heavily male dominated group.³⁴ The GOP and DNC are both heavily male dominated groups and it may be that exposure to successful female candidates may overcome leadership stereotypes traditionally associated with women.

Data from the 2010 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey suggests that women in Senior Executive Service in various US federal government agencies will face glass cliffs within their careers.³⁵ They are more likely to be set up for failures within their leadership roles than their male counterparts. However the failures can be lessened or avoided when women are put over policymaking decisions, or are given a sense of empowerment by their organization.

Over the course of the sixty years previous to the 1980's, women were disproportionately nominated in 'hopeless' districts for congressional seats.³⁶ Even though the hope that with the rise in female candidacy this gender gap within nominations would decrease, it did not happen the way researchers had first suggested. Republicans initially led Democrats in female nominations, but that pattern slowly changed. It will be my task to observe whether similar patterns of 'hopeless' candidacies still exist. The statistics from so many years of elections is important background information in tracking national progress. While females were given these unlikely

³⁴ Joyce Carbonnell and Yessenia Castro, "The Impact of a Leader Model On High Dominant Women's Self-Selection for Leadership," *Sex Roles* 58 (2008): 776-83.

³⁵ M. Shaberwal, "From Glass Ceiling to Glass Cliff: Women in Senior Executive Service," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25 (2015): 399-426.

³⁶ Irwin Gertzog and Michele Simard, "Women and 'Hopeless' Congressional Candidacies: Nomination Frequency, 1916-1978," *American Politics Quarterly* 9 (1981): 499-66.

congressional nominations it was not seen if winnability affected their overall performance as politicians as compared to their male party counterparts.³⁷

Evidence suggests that the Conservative Party preferentially selected women for highly contested seats in the 2005 UK general election.³⁸ Within controlled experimental environments women were still overly favored when a party considered the seat in crisis and men were selected when the seat was safe.³⁹ This evidence suggest that up till very recently within developed nations this effect is still occurring, and should require further research into how to overcome its consequences.

Kulich, Ryan, and Haslam's⁴⁰ study of seat selection within the United Kingdom generated results that I predicted would be mirrored within United States congressional elections. Their methodology provided the basis and background for my research, although mine will be more heavily gender focused rather than minority focused. By evaluating the likelihood that a party would be able to win a seat, and the success of that party over a series of elections it is able to find which seats were the highest risk and how disproportionally over selected women and minority candidates were for those seats. Research within the United States in this area has not been done to this extent to be able to show any sort of correlation between glass cliff effect and underperformance of minority candidates.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Michelle K. Ryan, S. Alexander Haslam, and Clara Kulich, "Politics and the Glass Cliff: Evidence That Women are Preferentially Selected to Contest Hard-to-Win Seats," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34 (2010): 56-64.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Clara Kulich, Michelle K. Ryan, and S. Alexander Haslam, "The Political Glass Cliff: Understanding How Seat Selection Contributes to the Underperformance of Ethnic Minority Candidates," *Political Research Quarterly* 67 (2014): 84-95.

Women in United States Political Parties

For this study it is important to understand more fully how the United States electoral system relates to gender and influences how and where women decide to run. Direct primaries in most states have eroded of the power of political parties to influence nominees within specific areas. Less than a third of political candidates however are completely self-starters, with the majority of those who run receiving encouragement or being persuaded by their party.⁴¹ This encouragement most popularly is shown through monetary support or access to media and advertisements. Even though they have been lost direct control of nominees, state and local political party bodies have increased in strength over the past several decades.⁴² The UK does not hold primaries for its parliament races, instead the candidate is directly chosen by the party. This study is able to use methods comparable to those used in the UK because of the party's continual broadened influence in who chooses to run in elections.

Within elections women may be at a slight advantage within highly female districts due to an increase in crossover votes. These instances have been attributed to the 'bonding' that is felt to happen between a female candidate and her constituents.⁴³ The number of women nominated by the Democratic Party continually outpaces those in the Republican Party, but the constituency itself is shown to increase the likelihood of a woman running. If there is a large history of women successfully holding office, more

⁴¹ Moncrief, Gary F., Peverill Squire, and Malcolm E. Jewell. *Who runs for the legislature?* Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2001. Print.

⁴² Rebecca S. Hatch, "Party Organizational Strength and Technological Capacity: the Adaptation of the State-Level Party Organizations in the United States to Voter Outreach and Data Analytics in the Digital Age," *Party Politics* 22 (2016): 191.

⁴³ Sanbonmatsu, *Where women run*, 124.

women will be nominated with the region, but in places like the South women are much less likely to run.⁴⁴

The partisan gap of women running will likely continue despite the increase of the Democratic pool of potential female candidates being two to three times larger than the Republican pool.⁴⁵ The rate of women present in the Republican Party has gone down as perceptions of the party's position on women's issues become increasingly negative. The party is viewed less welcoming to the moderate women who used to dominate many of their higher elected offices, especially in New England.⁴⁶ Women are more likely to self-select into political office under a party they perceive to be supportive of them and their candidacy.⁴⁷

Gender Quotas

While political parties in over 100 other countries have enacted gender quotas, whether by law or voluntarily, the United States does not have any parties with such an obvious institutional push for increases in the number of female candidates. Quotas to increase female officeholders within political parties have been shown to increase the distribution of females, but the underlying social and institutional factors contributing to the favoring of male candidates are not so easily fixed.⁴⁸ The relationship between gender and quotas and political institutions is dynamic, and according to the feminist

⁴⁴ Ibid, 162.

⁴⁵ Melody Crowder-Meyer, and Benjamin E. Lauderdale, "A Partisan Gap in the Supply of Female Potential Candidates in the United States," *Research & Politics* 1, no. 1 (2014): 1-7.

⁴⁶ Laurel Elder, "Whither Republican Women of New England?" *The New England Journal of Political Science* 7, no. 2 (2013): 161-93.

⁴⁷ Sandomatsu, *Where Women Run*, 125.

⁴⁸ Tania Verge, and Maria de La Fuente, "Playing with Different Cards: Party Politics, Gender Quotas, and Women's Empowerment," *International Bibliography of Social Sciences* 35 (January 2014): 67-79.

critique of politics, when women are allowed more access to politics the structures themselves will slowly change. The political recruitment process and intraparty politics within the legislature transformed under the influence of an increase of women due to gender quotas.⁴⁹ Studies suggest that voluntary gender quotas are just as effective as legal ones at promoting equality within political parties.⁵⁰ Even a single party implementing a gender quota can increase overall gender equality.⁵¹

There are many factors that may prohibit the success of political gender quotas, but one of the largest seems to be polarizing political language.⁵² When male and female differences are strongly emphasized within the language of equality pursuing policy it reinforces gender stereotypes among policymakers. This emphasis on traditional gender roles and personality traits hinders the potential success of the quota within the party.

Evidence has suggested that the various ways a gender quota is implemented can affect the overall role of women in the political sphere. When looking into issues of women's health for example, an increase in female representation correlates with positive conditions for women's health. However if a specific candidate gender quota is

49 Par Zetterberg, "The Dynamic Relationship between Gender Quotas and Political Institutions," *Politics & Gender* 9 (September 2016): 316-21.

50 Somani, Anisa A. "The Use of Gender Quotas in America: Are Voluntary Party Quotas the Way to Go?" *54 Wm. & Mary L. Rev.* 1451 (2013). Accessed March 3, 2017. <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmlr/vol54/iss4/7>.

51 Ibid.

52 Estefania Santacreu-Vasut, Amir Shoham, and Victor Gay, "Do Female/Male Distinctions in Language Matter? Evidence from Gender Political Quotas," *Applied Economics Letters*, 20 (March 15, 2013): 495-98.

enacted the relationship between these two variables becomes more consistent but is weaker overall.⁵³

THE PRESENT STUDY

Women within the US are greatly underrepresented in the political sphere. As of 2016 the Colorado State legislature is the closest to achieving equality with 42%⁵⁴ of their governing body being comprised of women. Mississippi has the lowest female representation at 13.3%.⁵⁵ Women in the US Congress make up 19.4%, which is significantly lower than the 24.8% of women in state legislatures.⁵⁶

In the 2010 general elections, 145 women ran as candidates (17.4% of all candidates, allowing exploration of the electorates in which women were chosen to run as a function of party and seat winnability. Of the two main parties, 22.6% of Democratic candidates were female in 2010, and 12.1% of Republican candidates were female. Democrats held 233 seats and Republicans held 202 seats after the 2006 elections (see Figure 1). In 2008 democrats gained 21 seats (see Figure 2). Republicans gained a total of 63 seats in the 2010 election, taking back a majority with 242 seats within the House (see Figure 3). 218 seats are required for a majority within the House of Representatives.

⁵³ Aubrey Westfall, and Carissa Chantiles, "The Political Cure: Gender Quotas and Women's Health," *Politics & Gender* 12 (September 2016): 469.

⁵⁴ National Conference of State Legislatures, *Women in State Legislatures for 2016*, (Washington, D.C.: NCSL, September 20, 2016), accessed February 15, 2017. <http://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislators/womens-legislative-network/women-in-state-legislatures-for-2016.aspx>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ CAWP, *Women in Elective Office 2017*.

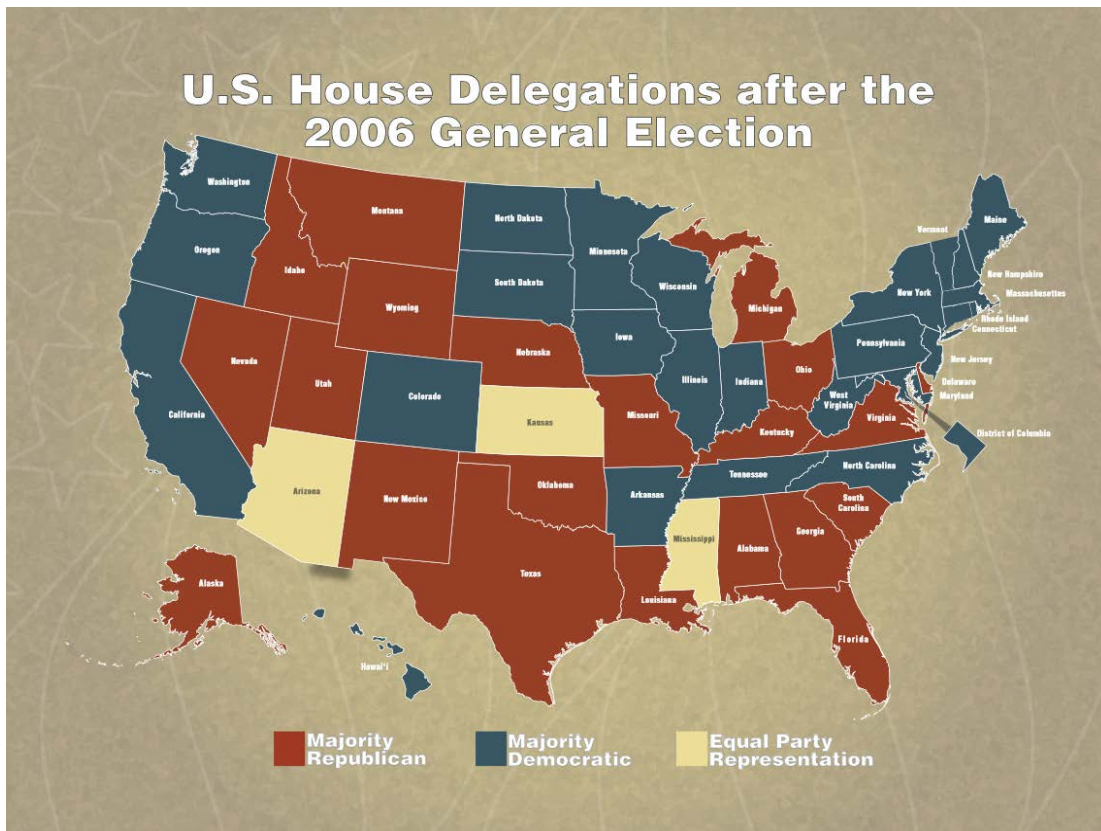


Figure 1 (2006 Federal Election Commission)

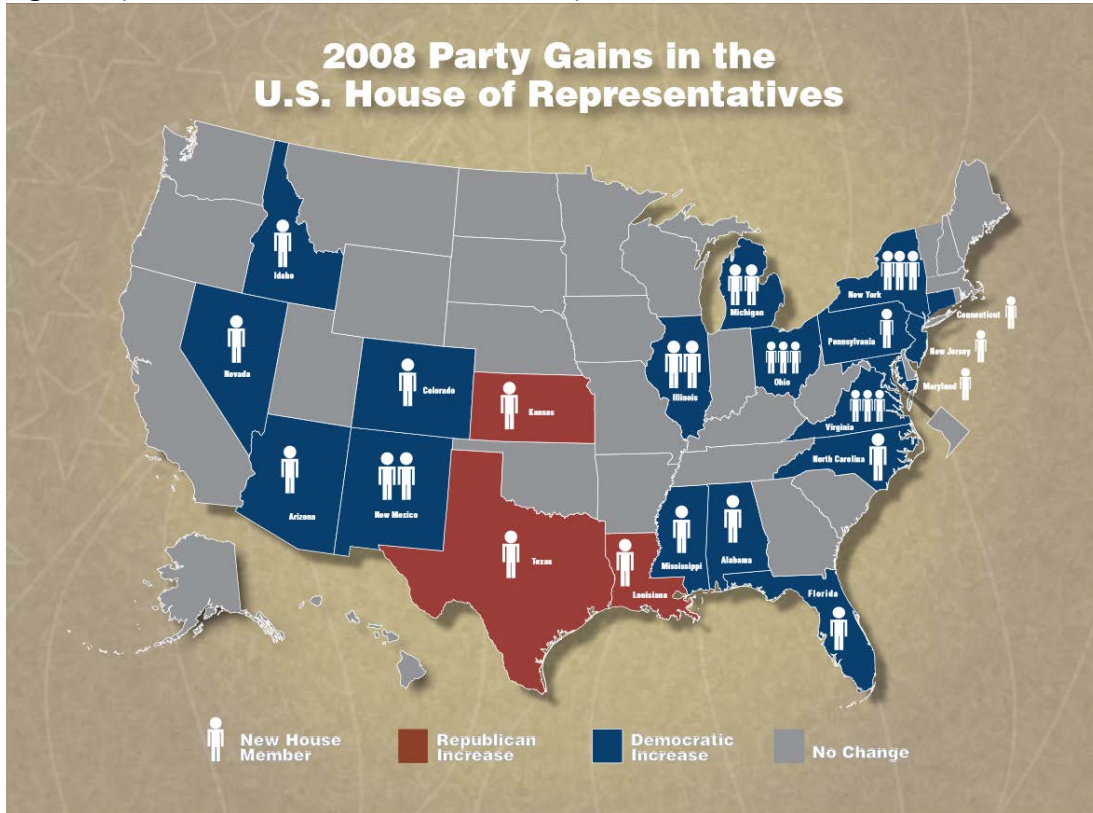


Figure 2 (2008 Federal Election Commission)



Figure 3 (2010 Federal Election Commission)

Experts say that representational equality can be considered as being achieved when women comprise a “critical minority” which is defined as holding 30-40% of the legislative body.⁵⁷ The worldwide average of women in legislature is only 20%.⁵⁸ Several countries have gender quota laws, or voluntary party quotas that help to bring the number of women in politics up to a larger percentage. The major US political parties do not currently have any gender quotas. My study builds on Ryan, Haslam, and Kulich’s 2010 observations that women are more likely than men to run in unwinnable, or

⁵⁷ Stina Laserud and Rita Taphorn. “Designing for Equality: Best-Fit, Medium-Fit, and Non-Favourable Combinations of Electoral Systems and Gender Quotas.” In Drude Dahlerup (International IDEA 2007), *Increasing Women’s Political Representation: New Trends in Gender Quotas*, in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (International IDEA rev. ed. 2005): 141, 142.

⁵⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments: World Average* (IPU, January 1, 2017), accessed March 7, 2017. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

hopeless seats.⁵⁹ The research looks at winnability as a continuous variable by examining the impact of seat winnability on percentage of votes received, or electoral success.

Reserachers in the business field have studied the theory of the glass cliff over the past decade. When it has been studied within politics it has been within the UK government. No research on the glass cliff has been conducted in regards to the United States national legislature. This analysis of US House of Representatives elections in 2006, 2008, and 2010 will be the first of its kind within available academic literature.

Based off of percentage of women running, and currently in office within the two parties, the Democratic Party has been more successful in encouraging women to run. In line with evidence of other domains, I hypothesized that in the Republican Party women will have been selected for significantly less winnable seats than those, which their Democratic female counterparts ran in affecting their electoral success significantly (Hypothesis 1). I also hypothesized that such selection biases will have had an impact on Republican women's electoral success, such that they would receive a significantly smaller percentage of the vote than Republican men (Hypothesis 2).

Method

Design and Procedures

The data used in this study was collected from the Federal Elections Committee archives for the House of Representative general elections of 2006, 2008⁶⁰, and 2010. Only

⁵⁹ Michelle K. Ryan, S. Alexander Haslam, and Clara Kulich, "Politics and the Glass Cliff: Evidence That Women are Preferentially Selected to Contest Hard-to-Win Seats," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34 (2010): 56-64.

candidates from the Democratic and Republican parties were considered. If there was run off election, only run off results were calculated. Not every district contained candidates from both major parties. If a candidate withdrew before the general, the party nominated substitute was calculated. Court ordered redistricting measures caused several districts to not be included in the winnability calculations.⁶¹ Several states choose congressional candidates by convention instead of primary. These candidates were included in calculations. If multiple Republican or Democratic candidates were running in the same district general election they were excluded due to splitting of party votes giving an inaccurate representation of party success. 1,602 candidates out of a possible 1,740 Republican and Democratic nominees were included in calculations. 273 candidates were female, and 1329 were male. 803 candidates were Republicans and 799 were Democrats.

Data was compiled from the United States Federal Election Commission and the Rutgers's Center for America Women and Politics. Information from the elections of 2006, 2008, and 2010 were merged and compiled containing the following information: (1) constituency; (2) candidate name; (3) number of votes won; (4) electoral success

⁶⁰ "Because of Hurricane Gustav, the primary elections of [Louisiana] originally scheduled for September 6, 2008, were moved to October 4, 2008, with primary runoff elections held on November 4, 2008 (if necessary). December 6, 2008, was the general election date for those districts that had a November 4, 2008, primary runoff election." –Federal Election Commission

⁶¹ "Court-ordered Special General Elections were held on November 7, 2006, in five of the thirty-two U.S. Congressional Districts of Texas: Districts 15, 21, 23, 25 and 28. The boundaries of these districts were redrawn in an August 4, 2006, opinion and order of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, Marshall Division, in *League of United Latin American Citizens, et. al. v. Rick Perry, Governor of Texas, et. al.*, pursuant to the U.S. Supreme Court's remand order of June 28, 2006. (The results of the March 2006 primary election for these districts were consequently invalidated.) Where no candidate received a majority of the votes cast, a Special Runoff Election was held on December 12, 2006, between the top two vote-getters, regardless of party. The general election and general runoff election columns show the results of the special elections." – Federal Election Commission

(percentage of votes won); (5) candidate gender; (6) party affiliation; (7) incumbency; (8) relative winnability of the seat for each candidate.

Analytic Strategy

The impact of candidates' demographic traits on electoral success and winnability of a seat (both continuous variables) was calculated as a function of candidates' gender and political party. Gender and party affiliation were both dichotomous variables coded -1 and 1. Incumbency (yes, no) was controlled for. Main effects for control variables and independent variables and all interactions between our independent variables (party and gender) were entered into a regression analysis. Dummy variables for male and female were used to sort data into mutually exclusive categories and were coded as 0 and 1 within the analysis. Dummy variables for Republicans and Democrats were also used in this way. All means are estimated means that are corrected for the covariance produced by any of the other variables in the model. The standardized regression coefficients (B), the standard error (Std Err), the t value, the significance (p), and the 95% confidence intervals lower and upper bounds (95% CI) are all reported, sometimes including the F statistic or the R^2 value.

In a between-groups analysis of covariance (ANOVA), the dependent variable was winnability, reporting the effect of gender, party, and the effect of the gender x party interaction. In a second ANOVA electoral success was the dependent variable looking for the same effects. These effects were then dissected to look for areas of significance of gender on Republicans, gender on Democrats, party on males, and party on females with electoral success as the dependent variable.

In the following, results for gender and party are presented separately to simplify the interpretation in light of our hypotheses. Significant and insignificant interactions are reported. In a second set of regression analysis, winnability was used as a control variable for electoral success when measuring the effect of candidate gender, political party, and the interaction of gender x party. These effects were dissected in the same method of looking for gender on Republicans, gender on Democrats, party on males, and party on females while controlling for winnability. This was used to identify areas of significant interaction between winnability and electoral success.

Results

Winnability

In order to investigate the impact of candidate gender and party on winnability an ANOVA was run. The regression line for had an expected goodness of fit, $R^2 = .43$. There was a significant effect of party on winnability, $B = 8.71$, $\text{Std Err} = 1.21$, $t(1596) = 7.18$, $F = 51.52$, $p < .0001$, 95% CI [6.33, 11.09]. Being the majority party in 2006 and 2008 it is unsurprising that Democrats ran in seats with significantly higher margins of previous electoral success. The mean winnability margin for Democrats was 7.69%, $\text{St Err} = 1.47$, and the mean winnability for Republicans was -9.72%, $\text{St Err} = 1.92$. Within the districts Democrats won in 2010, they had a higher margin of electoral success than Republicans. However Republicans won by smaller margins in many more seats in 2010 to regain the majority (see Figure 3).

There was no significant effect of gender on winnability, $B = 1.11$, $\text{St Err} = 1.21$, $t(1596) = .92$, $F = .85$, $p = .36$, 95% CI [-1.23, 3.48]. While there was a large gap for

women and men of the two parties the average margins which their party won by in the previous year were not greatly different. The mean winnability margin for men was -2.13%, St Err = .94, and the mean for women was .097%, St Err = 2.22.

These two main effects were qualified by a two-way interaction, however there was no significant effect of the interaction of gender x party on winnability, $B = 1.13$, St Err = 1.21, $t(1596) = .94$, $F = .88$, $p = .35$, 95% CI [-1.23, 3.5]. However, decomposing the interaction may have revealed differing levels of significance between the specific genders of each party.

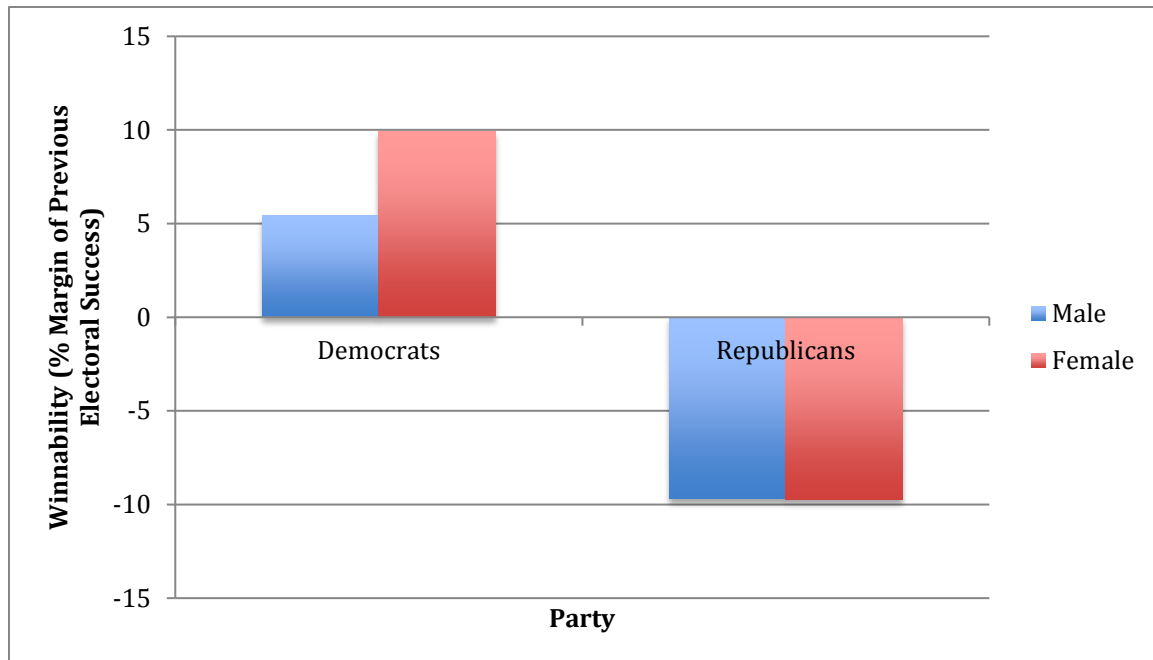


Table 1: Male Democrats = 5.45%, Female Democrats = 9.93%, Male Republicans = -9.7%, Female Republicans = -9.74%

Electoral Success

In order to investigate the impact of candidate gender and party on electoral success a between-groups ANOVA was conducted. There was a significant effect of party on electoral success, $B = 1.2$, St Err = .45, $t(1596) = 2.68$, $F = 7.19$, $p = .007$, 95% CI [.32,

2.08]. Republicans achieved a mean of 49.4%, St Err = .71 of the vote and Democrats held mean of 51.8%, St Err .543. Given that the Democrats won their elections by higher margins this effect was expected.

There was no significant overall effect of gender on electoral success, $B = .31$, St Err = .45, $t(1596) = .69$, $F = .48$, $p = .49$, 95% CI $[-.57, 1.18]$. Females had a mean of 50.91%, St Err = .82 of electoral success, and males had an average of 50.29%, St Err = .35.

These two main effects were qualified by a two-way interaction showing that there was an effect of the interaction of gender x party on electoral success, $B = 1.54$, St Err = .45, $t(1596) = 3.45$, $F = 11.93$, $p = .001$, CI $[.67, 2.41]$.

Decomposing this interaction showed various main effects for gender by each party and each party by gender. There was no significant effect of party for men, $B = -.34$, St Err = .36, $t(1597) = .95$, $p = .34$, 95% CI $[-1.04, .36]$. Estimated means for men were 49.95%, St Err = .52 for Democrats and 50.62%, St Err = .48 for Republicans.

Unsurprisingly, there was a simple effect of party for women, $B = 2.74$, St Err = .82, $t(1597) = -1.74$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[-1.13, 4.35]$. Democratic women won a significantly higher percentage of votes within their congressional districts than women within the Republican Party. Democratic females on average received 53.64%, St Err = .95 of the vote, and Republican females on average received 48.16%, St Err = 1.33 of the vote. Democratic females were the most highly successful group during these election cycles, and Republican females were the least successful.

There was no significant simple effect of gender for republican, $B = -1.23$, $St\ Err = .71$, $t(1597) = -1.74$, $p = .083$, 95% CI $[-2.62, .16]$. Republican men received 50.63% of the vote on average, and Republican women received 48.16% of the vote on average within their congressional districts. This significance factor is still statistically low and worth noting. Expanding the years studied allowing for a larger sample pool of elections over time may show a significant trend, not obviously apparent within the elections of 2006, 2008, and 2010.

There was a significant simple effect of gender for Democrats, $B = 1.85$, $St\ Err = .54$, $t(1597) = 3.42$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[.79, 2.91]$. Female Democrats won a significantly higher portion of the votes within their congressional districts at an average of 53.65% than their male counterparts with an average of 49.95%. This evidence suggests that if there is a glass cliff, as defined by women having lower electoral success in an election because of the 'hopelessness' of their congressional seat for the party it exists only for those women within the Republican party, and no such cliff exists for those women of the Democratic party.

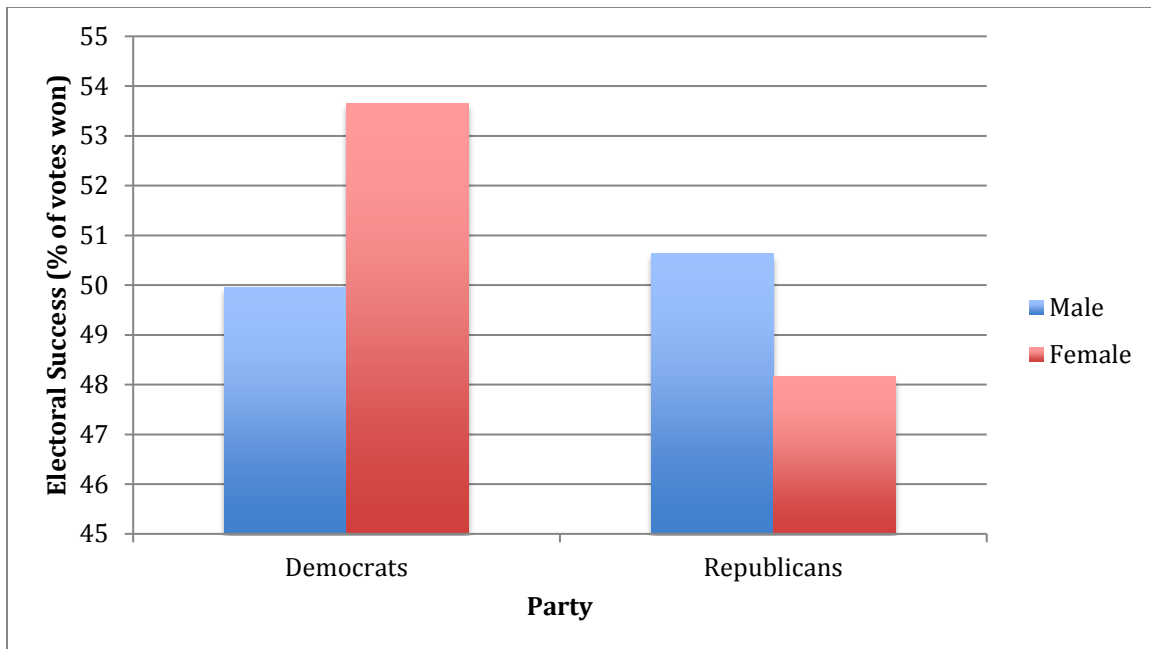


Table 2: Male Democrats = 49.95%, Female Democrats = 53.64%, Male Republicans = 50.63%, Female Republicans = 48.16%

Winnability's Effects on Electoral Success

The above analysis demonstrates that Republican women enjoy the lowest amount of electoral success out of the men and women within the two main parties. Additional regression analyses were completed to test the effects, if any, winnability played on electoral success. There was an overall extremely significant effect of winnability on electoral success, $B = .18$, $St\ Err = .008$, $t(1596) = 21.58$, $F = 465.52$, $p < .0001$, $CI [.16, .19]$. There was no effect of party on electoral success, controlling for winnability, $B = 1.32$, $St\ Err = .4$, $t(1596) = -.8$, $F = .64$, $p = .42$, $95\% CI [-1.11, .47]$. Excluding winnability this effect had been significant, suggesting that winnability played a role in the success of Democratic candidates over their Republican counterparts. There was no significant effect of gender on electoral success, controlling for winnability, $B = .11$, $St\ Err = .39$, $t(1596)$, $F = .08$, $p = .77$, $95\% CI [-.66, .88]$. This remained constant with the

findings of the previous tests, even lessening the significance from $p = .36$, showing a partial regression.

Overall there was a significant effect of the two-way interaction of gender x party on electoral success, controlling for winnability, $B = 1.34$, $St\ Err = .39$, $t(1596) = 3.415$, $F = 11.66$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [.57, 2.11]. This showed no virtually no change from the gender x party effect on electoral success without winnability.

Again we decomposed these effects into four separate regression analyses in order to show any categorical differences when controlling for winnability. Unlike before there was a simple effect of party for men, $B = -1.66$, $St\ Err = .32$, $t(1596) = -5.21$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-2.29, -1.04], showing that when controlling for winnability Republican men have significantly higher electoral success than Democratic men with estimated means of 52.76%, $St\ Err = .43$ and 49.43%, $St\ Err = .46$ respectively. This suggests that winnability is not as large of a contributing factor for men as is party.

Unlike the significant effect of party for women on electoral success $p = .001$, there is no simple effect of party for women when controlling for winnability, $B = 1.02$, $St\ Err = -.73$, $t(1596) = 1.40$, $p = .16$, 95% CI [-.41, 2.44]. This effect shows that controlling for winnability the estimated mean of Democratic women is 52.34%, $St\ Err = .84$, and the estimated mean of Republican women is 50.3%, $St\ Err = 1.18$. Even though Democratic women still achieve slightly more electoral success than their Republican counterparts it is no longer significant, implicating winnability of the seat as a primary contributing factor to the gap in electoral success, putting Republican women at a disadvantage in line with Hypothesis 1.

There remains a significant simple effect of gender for Democrats even when controlling for winnability, $B = 1.46$, $St\ Err = .48$, $t(1596) = 3.05$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [.52, 2.39], although it has become slightly less significant. While winnability may play a partial role in the electoral success of Democrats based off of gender it is not a large one.

While there was not a simple effect of gender for Republicans on electoral success before, when controlling for winnability it is seen that there is a significant effect, $B = -1.23$, $St\ Err = .48$, $t(1596) = -1.97$, $p < .05$ (.049613), CI [-2.45, -.002]. This control variable brings the value to just under the point of statistically significant. This suggests that the lack of electoral success of female Republican candidates as opposed to their male counterparts is more dependent on their gender than on the winnability of their individual congressional seats, in opposition to Hypothesis 2.

After controlling for winnability, Democratic men experienced the least amount of electoral success, and Republican men experienced the most. These findings are inverse of the effects without winnability and suggest it's larger role overall in determining the winner of specific electoral districts.

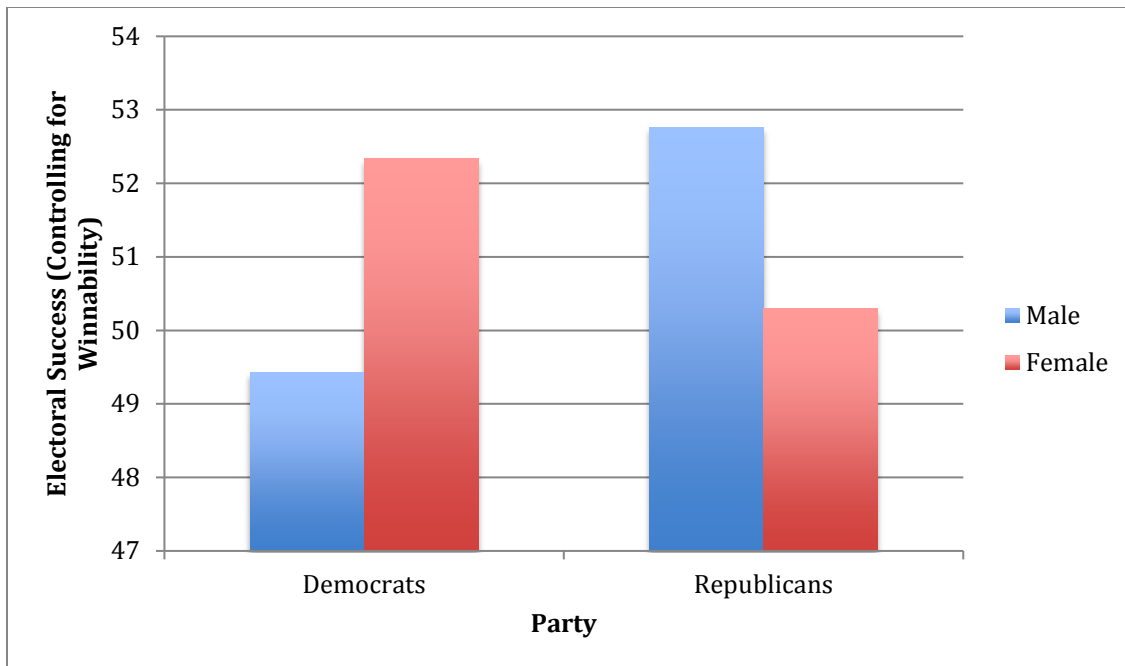


Table 3: Male Democrats = 49.43%, Female Democrats = 52.34%, Male Republicans = 52.76%, Female Republicans = 50.3%

Discussion

The results from this study provide some archival support for a glass cliff within the 2006, 2008, and 2010 general elections for the House of Representatives. In line with hypothesis 1, female Republicans were placed in seats with a much lower likelihood of success than their Democratic counterparts, and winnability played a significant role within their electoral success. If Republican women were theoretically placed in roles with a similar winnability to Democrats it is likely that there would be higher rates of success among Republican women. These findings, in combination with the previous academic literature on the subject, imply that Republican women may view themselves as being more welcomed in the party, leading to higher numbers of Republican female candidacies.

The second hypothesis was not supported, in that winnability was not a significant factor in female Republicans' lack of electoral success when compared to male Republicans. This second finding calls to light that other factors besides seat winnability will need to be analyzed in discussing the differences between female and male electoral success in the Republican party. Republican women continue to underperform in the political arena and it has been suggested that they are poorly equipped for handling the challenges of running for public office, more than any other group.⁶² However, there being no findings of significant differences by party for women when winnability is taken into account suggests that Republican women are not failing to convince the voters, but it is their seat 'hopelessness' in partnership with their gender that has put them at such a disadvantage, consistent with the theory of the glass cliff.

The lack of finding such glass cliff effects within the Democratic Party suggests that efforts to be more inclusive towards women have been beneficial in raising women's electoral success within the party. As the Democratic Party continues to draw women into prominent leadership positions it should be viewed as a case study for the successes and failures of various efforts towards increasing gender equality.

CONCLUSION

The glass cliff is a complex and multifaceted problem. It attempts to summarize a systematic effect that may be strongly context-dependent on an interaction of organizational policy, women's choice, stereotypes, implicit theories of leadership, the nature of crises, and the characteristics of individuals involved in the process. There has

⁶² E. Judge, "Women on board: Help or hindrance?" *The Times*, November 11, 2003, p. 21.

been over a decade of evidence for the glass cliff and its effects in business and politics.⁶³ The true question when studying this effect is what comes after? Further study needs to be conducted into the women who take on these 'hopeless' candidacies, and their successes and failure further into their careers. Within business, female leadership put into crisis situations are more likely to be replaced by majority members because there is little forgiveness for their inability to lead a company out of crisis.⁶⁴

It is difficult to find evidence for the glass cliff effect on a case-by-case basis. The cause of a woman's lack of success may be due to systematic problems or personal incompetency on an individual level. The glass cliff is a larger issue that looks not only at women being thrown into difficult roles, but also at men being preferentially selected for "cushy leadership positions."⁶⁵ On a larger scale across high power industries this pattern is alarmingly present as a hindrance to representative gender equality.

Future Research

Further mediation analyses may be ran on the current data set to study the extent to which winnability effect electoral success. These analyses were limited by the scope of this project, and what was feasible to accomplish as an undergraduate student. With the publishing of the 2016 election results there is currently sufficient data with which to compare district winnability following the boundary changes after the 2010 census. Future research may consider the effects that the gender and the ethnic minority status of the candidate have on electoral success, as has been conducted

⁶³ Michelle K. Ryan, S. Alexander Haslam, Thekla Morgenroth, Floor Rink, Janka Stoker, and Kim Peters, "Getting on Top of the Glass Cliff: Reviewing a Decade of Evidence, Explanations, and Impact," *The Leadership Quarterly* 27(2016): 446-55.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 55.

within the UK. The theory of the glass cliff is complex and takes many social factors into account. Fully understanding the causation and motives that set women up for failure in high power positions may not be totally possible. Awareness however of the implications will be vital for combatting the glass cliff effect on the road to gender equality.

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