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

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“We’re half the people, we should be half the Congress.”
Leadership Stereotypes

- This Crisis – Think Female (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby & Bongiorno 2011)
  - Modification of Think Manager – Think Male

- The “Women are Wonderful” Effect (Eagly & Mladinic 1994)

- Stereotype related hindrances are multiplied within ethnic minority women (Harris-Perry 2011) (Bui 2013)
The Glass Cliff

- In times of crisis female leadership is preferred by constituents (Burckmüller & Branscombe 2010)
  - Also applied to male’s with traditionally female traits

- Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich (2010, 2014)
  - UK parliamentary elections
  - Winnability’s effect on electoral success was significant
  - Applies to minority groups and women
Females in U.S. Political Parties

• Direct primaries and party effect (Moncreif, Squire & Jewell 2001)
• Voter self identification, and historical female success (Sanbonmatsu 2006)
• Democrat’s female candidate pool 3x that of Republican’s (Crowder-Meyer & Lauderdale 2014)
• Gender Quotas

Top: Hillary Rodham Clinton
Bottom: Shirley Chisholm
Right: Nancy Pelosi
Women in the Conservative Party are more likely to run in “unwinnable” seats (Ryan, Haslam & Kulich 2010)

Hypothesis 1 – Winnability would be a significant factor in the lower electoral success of Republican women, compared to Democratic women

Hypothesis 2 - Winnability would be a significant factor in the lower electoral success of Republican women, compared to Republican men

Election results from the US House of Representatives gathered for 2006, 2008, & 2010

First academic study to show the existence of the glass cliff in modern US politics
Democrats: 233 seats

Republicans: 202 seats
Democrats: 257 seats (gained 21)

Republicans: 178 seats
Republicans: 242 seats (gained 63)
Democrats: 193
Design and Procedures

- Federal Election Commission Reports and Party Rosters
  - (1) constituency; (2) candidate name; (3) number of votes won; (4) electoral success (percentage of votes won); (5) candidate gender; (6) party affiliation; (7) incumbency; (8) relative winnability of the seat for each candidate.

- 1,602 candidates out of a possible 1,740 Republican and Democratic nominees were included
  - 273 candidates were female, and 1329 were male.
  - 803 candidates were Republicans and 799 were Democrats.
Analytic Strategy

- **Variables**
  - Incumbency (yes, no) was controlled for in all tests
  - Winnability and Electoral Success were continuous variables
  - Dummy variables sorted data into mutually exclusive categories for analysis
  - Gender and party affiliation were both dichotomous variables coded -1 and 1

- **Used Between-Groups Analysis of Covariance (ANOVA)**
  - Test 1: DV – Winnability, IV – Party, Gender, and Gender x Party
  - Test 2: DV – Electoral Success, IV – Party, Gender, Gender x Party
  - Test 3: DV – Electoral Success, IV – Party, Gender, Gender x Party, Controlling for Winnability

- **Effects were dissected into**
  - Gender on Republicans
  - Gender on Democrats
  - Party on males
  - Party on females
Results

- **Test 1: Winnability**
  - Significant effect of party on winnability, \( p < .0001 \)
  - No significant effect of gender on winnability, \( p = .36 \)
  - No significant effect of the interaction of Gender x Party on winnability, \( p = .35 \)

- **Test 2: Electoral Success**
  - Significant effect of party on electoral success, \( p = .007 \)
  - No significant effect of gender on electoral success, \( p = .49 \)
  - Significant effect of the interaction of Gender x Party on electoral success, \( p = .001 \)

- **Test 3: Electoral Success Controlling for Winnability**
  - Significant effect of winnability on electoral success, \( p < .0001 \)
  - **No significant effect of party on electoral success, \( p = .42 \)**
  - No significant effect of gender on electoral success, \( p = .77 \) (suggests partial mediation)
  - Significant effect of the interaction of Gender x Party on electoral success, \( p = .001 \)
**Winnability**

Male Democrats = 5.45%, Female Democrats = 9.93%
Male Republicans = -9.7%, Female Republicans = -9.74%
Electoral Success

Male Democrats = 49.95%, Female Democrats = 53.64%
Male Republicans = 50.63%, Female Republicans = 48.16%
Electoral Success Controlling for Winnability

Male Democrats = 49.43%, Female Democrats = 52.34%
Male Republicans = 52.76%, Female Republicans = -50.3%
Results Cont.

- **Electoral Success**
  - Party for Men, no significant effect, $p = .34$
  - Party for Women, significant effect, $p = .001$
  - Gender for Republicans, no significant effect, $p = .083$
  - Gender for Democrats, significant effect, $p = .001$

- **Electoral Success Controlling for Winnability**
  - Party for Men, significant effect, $p < .001$
  - Party for Women, no significant effect, $p = .16$
  - Gender for Republicans, significant effect, $p < .05$ (.049613)
  - Gender for Democrats, significant effect, $p = .002$
Discussion and Conclusion

- In line with Hypothesis 1, that a glass cliff does exist for Republican women compared to their female counterparts.

- Disproved Hypothesis 2, gender was a larger contributing factor to the difference in electoral success, than winnability when comparing male and female republicans.

- Two sided issue (Ryan et. al. 2016)
Future Research

- Study time frame where congressional majority moved from Republicans to Democrats
- Develop method to overcome census issue
- Minority status
References


