

Campaigning for Women

The gender gap in the financing of political campaigns

Isabella Gutierrez

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Abstract:

Women have made great strides towards garnering attention, motivation, and enthusiasm toward diverse female political campaigns. However, women still face several instances of sexism, one of which includes, how they've been and still are being viewed in politics. In my essay I will research and discuss examples of how sexism permeates political races in the United States. I will briefly touch on past research, which shows how women have been viewed previously in political campaigns. I will mainly focus my research on recent elections and the examples of sexism displayed. I will focus more specifically on the example of campaign finances, and how women have statistically raised and received less money. I will lastly discuss reasons why women have and have not wanted to run for office, and what the future may hold for women wishing to run a political campaign.

Today women hold 1,874 of the 7,383 legislative seats nationally, according to a tally by Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics. Though a record number of women ran for congress this year, previously women were more skeptical to get involved in political office. They're even less likely than they were four years ago to think voters are ready for a female elected official. According to New York Times, 57% of women now say skepticism is a major reason that women are underrepresented in high political offices, up from 41% in 2014. When the electorate doubt the actions that women could take in politics, this in turn may push them not to vote or elect them. In a survey given by Isabella Gutierrez on women and their ability to run for office, 5% of surveyors said they didn't know if they would support women in local, state, or congressional elections, and 10% of surveyors said they didn't know whether or not women could work equally as well as men in political roles. With this previous and pending doubt on women and their positions in politics, for women wanting to be involved in the future, this could cause them to surrender their hopes of political engagement. However, in an article by reporter Alex Gray, he remarks that "at this time, more women than ever are running for office. In fact, they are breaking records, in what has become known as the "pink wave" of US politics." With the recent midterms breaking barriers, for women wanting to become more politically involved, the future is looking optimistic.

In recent years, women have consistently raised lower amounts of money for their campaigns than men. In general, most campaigns are often funded majorly by donors, whether they be individual or from a large group or organization. Women have statistically not been able to raise as much as men, making it harder for them to run a successful campaign. With women already not receiving large amounts of donations from men, they also receive less from big corporations. This then urges women to seek other sources for funding. In a study by Brian Adams and Ronnee Schreiber (2016), they state how women have had a hard time attracting money from traditional sources, and may need to then appeal to a wider range of alternative contributors. These alternatives are often political action committees (PACs) and other organizations. Emily's List, a PAC that majorly funds Female democrats hoping to run for office, gave the most money this year to help these women kick start their campaigns. In a statement from Emilslist.org they state how their "grassroots community of over five million members helps Democratic women wage competitive campaigns – and win... recruit and train candidates, support strong campaigns, research the issues that impact women and families, and turn out women voters." (Emily's List 2018). Emily's List has been a huge powerhouse, in terms of PACs helping women who have high hopes for running for office. In addition to PACs women have had to seek donations from their fellow females, as males donate to female candidates much less than they donate to their male counterparts. In total, according to political findings from Center for Responsive Politics, men garnered 1.1 billion dollars in donations total for all their campaigns, with women falling heavily behind raising only 441 million. (Leonard, 2018). There is an obvious gap in the amount of money females raise versus males, furthering the point that women are still at a disadvantage, in politics and in raising campaign finances.

If women are statistically raising less in campaigns, even in recent elections, this may discourage women from deciding whether or not to run in a political campaign. This aside, women may also decide against running in fear of discrimination. The way they are seen in the public eye, may discourage women from thinking about campaigning. Researchers Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless contend that “less political ambition among women may be due in part to a belief that the political press treats women unfairly.” (2017) Women candidates, by the media or otherwise, often get picked apart in their appearance, their choices, their words, and their policies. Coverage of women in a negative or unfair way may turn them away from wanting to campaign for a future election. Though some women may be against running for office from fear of statistically low campaign funding or from discrimination, there are still some studies that report on women remaining hopeful for the future. With many candidates already running (and winning) in several political offices this year, this may motivate even more women to consider running. Further, many women have issues or policies they really believe in, further inspiring them to move forward in running and put their platform into action. In a film titled, American Women Fund Political Campaigns in Innovative ways, candidates describe why they want to run, and ways they found to make it more possible. People want to be involved and can find interesting and cooperative ways to help the process. (2018) Similarly, Vice president of Emily's List, Jess McIntosh argues, "We're even seeing political issues that don't usually get talked about as women's issues," McIntosh argued. "I think seeing great female candidates, talking about women's issues in a way that really clearly defines the contrast between the two candidates running, just means that more women than ever are engaged in the process." Women continually want to be involved in political change happening in the United States, and Emily's List has been

contacted by more than 40,000 women interested in running for office since the 2016 election. (Emily's List, 2018). Whether or not women decide to run in a political campaign depends on many factors, however, if they continue to see positive motivating political actors lead the way, they may just follow.

Females and the contributions to their campaigns remain strained in US politics. Females and their campaigns continue to be one of the many disproportionate and discriminatory facets of our society. Women statistically raise less for their campaigns than men, and also receive fewer donations as a whole. Nonetheless, the barriers females face both in politics and in campaigning, continue to be broken. Political science professor Christina Bejarano remarks on the strides women have made, toward bettering our society . “Even if they do not win, their candidacies could have an impact on the way issues are discussed and on future elections,” (Bejarano 2018) Women are changing the way important issues are being talked about and faced. The future for campaign and its financing will expectantly change for the better. “[They] are broadening our political models for candidates and their campaigns,” Bejarano said. “They are breaking the mold.”

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