FORTALEZAS Y DEBILIDADES: LIDERAZGO POLÍTICO FEMENINO
EN LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

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Abstract: La derrota de Hillary Clinton en la elección presidencial EE.UU. consternado las feministas que esperaban para elegir a la primera mujer presidente. Comentaristas de la elección dijeron que los electores no les gustó ella porque no estaban listos para elegir una mujer presidente. Este estudio investiga la posibilidad que los prejuicios de género era un factor influyente en las elecciones de 2016. En los Estados Unidos las elecciones tengan lugar estado por estado, con los candidatos que compiten en 50 elecciones estatales. Este estudio examina el liderazgo político femenino a través de los 50 estados, clasificándoles por su compromiso probada para elegir a las mujeres a altos cargos políticos. En contraste con el fracaso para elegir un presidente de sexo femenino, muchos estados han elegido a mujeres como gobernadores, senadores y representantes en el Congreso. Pero muchos estados no han tenido alto nivel de liderazgo político femenino. Este patrón sugiere que algunos estados no están listos para elegir una mujer presidente. Para promover las oportunidades políticas de las mujeres, las femenistas deben tratar de ampliar las mujeres en cargos de gobernador y el Congreso de EE.UU.

Keywords: Participación política, representación, los prejuicios de género, Presidencia EE.UU.

Many nations around the globe have been led by women, including high-income states like the UK, Germany, and Canada, middle-income nations such as Brazil, Argentina, India, Pakistan, and Indonesia, and low-income states such as Liberia. However, the United States has never had a female president. The candidacy of Hillary Clinton as the Democratic nominee in the 2016 election was the most serious attempt so far to elect a US woman president. Despite gaining the majority of popular votes, Clinton failed to win sufficient votes in the Electoral College, the decisive element in a presidential election, and the nod went to the Republican candidate Donald Trump.

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During Election Night news coverage, as Trump's win became more likely, some female commentators suggested that voters rejected Hillary Clinton because they were not ready for a female president. Veteran political commentator Cokie Roberts, for instance, said that Donald Trump's electoral success was partly due to a "strong sentiment about not having a woman president" (Roberts 2016). Others noted that some states had never voted for a woman in high office and could hardly be expected to vote for a female president.

If these observations are accurate, then gender bias was a significant factor in the 2016 presidential election. US political parties in the future may be reluctant to nominate a woman as their presidential candidate if they feel voters are not ready for a female president. They would not want to risk losing the election by putting forward a candidate who would be disqualified by some state electorates due to her gender. In that case, it could be many election cycles before another female politician becomes the nominee of a major political party despite the availability of many female governors and US senators, the usual jumping-off point for a presidential run. However, if gender bias were not a significant factor in the 2016 election, if Clinton's loss were due instead to non-gender reasons such as campaign strategies, then major political parties may be more willing to consider another female nominee in the near future.

Measuring gender bias in a voting population presents challenges since voters themselves may not be aware of personal bias or may be reluctant to reveal feelings of bias towards female candidates. In addition, voting decisions are complex and may involve many factors such as party affiliation, personal economic situation, candidates' campaign strategies, and the effectiveness of political advertising. The 2016 election results were especially surprising since most polling data before the election indicated that Clinton was favored to win. If voters were frank with pollsters about their voting preferences, polls would have been more accurate in predicting a Trump victory.

Rather than ask voters directly about gender bias, another approach is to look at past voting behavior for female candidates by state. Since US presidential elections are decided by electoral votes allocated by state, the collective voting behavior of an entire state is more significant than individual votes. A presidential candidate must contend in fifty separate elections state by state rather than one national election vote by vote. An analysis by state can give insight into collective gender bias by voters in each state. If a state has a history of voting for female candidates for high office, it lessens the likelihood that gender bias was an important factor in the 2016 presidential
States with little history of voting for female candidates for high office may be more likely to have collective gender bias in voting behavior. In those cases, significant gender bias in the 2016 presidential election cannot be ruled out.

This paper examines the history of female political leadership in the fifty states as a way to assess gender bias in the 2016 presidential election. It considers female incumbents of two high-ranking statewide offices, governor and US senator. It ranks states by their score on a newly devised Female Political Leadership Index based on the number of elections of female governors and US senators and their length of service in office. Then it analyzes the overlap between the Female Political Leadership score and each state's electoral vote in the 2016 election, with consideration of traditional political party preferences. The paper hypothesis is that states with a higher score on the Female Political Leadership Index were more likely to vote for Clinton. The paper concludes that while the political landscape is complex, gender bias cannot be ruled out in five key states: Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Michigan.

**Methods**

To assess high-ranking female political leadership in the US, the author compiled a female political leadership (FPL) database of all female governors and US senators with their elections and years of service. Data were obtained from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP 2017a, b) at Rutgers University Eagleton Institute of Politics and from the National Governors Association (NGA 2017a, b).

The database includes each state's vote in the eight presidential elections since 1988 as either Democratic or Republican. States that had voted Democratic in most of the seven presidential elections from 1988-2012 were dubbed "blue" while states that had voted Republican in those elections were dubbed "red," following conventional shorthand. Data was obtained from the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The Project provided 2016 election results as they were officially certified by each state, showing the electoral vote victory for Trump (304 votes to Clinton's 227) and the popular vote victory for Clinton (65,853,516 votes to Trump's 62,984,824) (Woolley and Peters 2017b).

The Female Political Leadership Index was compiled by calculating a score for each state using the following formula:
number of elections of female governors
+ number of elections of female US senators
+ time served in office by elected female governors and US senators

= FPL score.

Women rising to their office via a retirement or appointment and not subsequently elected in their own right were not included in the FPL Index. If a woman was first appointed and then elected, the time served while appointed was included in the Index. Time served was calculated by half-months; a length of service of more than 15 days was considered an additional month. For the handful of cases where the official served less than a month in all, the percent of days per year was calculated.

The rationale behind the elements of the FPL Index is that the more times a state electorate voted for a high female official, the more credible subsequent female candidates for high office would be. With more time in office, the elected official provided a substantial role model of female political leadership for the state population. Both quantity of elections and length in office increased the legitimacy of female political leadership and the likelihood that the state electorate would seriously consider a female candidate for president without significant gender bias.

**US female political leadership**

The database compiled for this study demonstrates that many women have served as governors or US senators on both sides of the aisle. A total of 39 women have served in the executive role of governor, and 32 have been elected to the governor's office in their own right (the others succeeded a retiring or deceased governor). While the majority of elected female governors have been Democrats (21), eleven elected female governors were Republican (CAWP 2017a). Two women of color have served as governor, both Republicans: Nikki Haley (R-SC)\(^2\) and Susana Martinez (R-NM). Six female governors currently serve: in addition to Martinez, they are Mary Fallin (R-OK), Gina Raimondo (D-RI), Kate Brown (D-OR), the first openly gay person to be elected governor (Phillips 2016), Kay Ivey (R-AL), and Kim Reynolds (R-IA) (CAWP 2017a).

\(^2\) Nikki Haley currently serves as US Ambassador to the United Nations, a role that promises to burnish her foreign policy credentials and add to her attractiveness as a presidential candidate in the future.
New Hampshire has had two female governors that subsequently became US senators, Jeanne Shaheen (D) and Maggie Hassan (D) (CAWP 2017a). No other women have served as both governor and US senator, experience that may qualify these female politicians for a future presidential run.

Fifty women have served in the US Senate and 39 were elected, including 26 Democrats and 13 Republicans. The longest serving female senator was Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) with 30 years, followed by Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), and Patty Murray (D-WA) with 24 years each.³

Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL) was the first woman of color in the Senate (1993-1999), and Mazie Hirona (D-HI) became the lone woman of color in 2013. The number of concurrent female senators of color quadrupled in 2017 with the addition of Kamala Harris (D-CA), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) (Cauterucci 2016).

Four states have sent concurrent female senators to represent them. California was represented by Feinstein (D) and Boxer (D) for 24 years; with Boxer's retirement in 2017, Kamala Harris (D) will continue the all-female Senate representation. Washington State has been represented by Patty Murray (D) and Maria Cantwell (D) for the past 16 years. Maine was represented by Susan Collins (R) and Olympia Snowe (R) for 16 years until Snowe's retirement in 2013. New Hampshire was represented by Jeanne Shaheen (D) and Kelly Ayotte (R) for six years, and Maggie Hassan (D) replaced Ayotte in 2017 to continue the all-female delegation. The current Senate includes 21 female senators, the highest number of women in its history, with 16 Democrats and 5 Republicans (CAWP 2017b).

Index rankings

When elections and terms of female governors and senators are combined into the Female Political Leadership Index (FPL), the rankings show the strong leadership of California, Washington State, and Maine (see Map 1, US Female Governors and Senators). Those three states lead the rankings with scores in excess of 40. Maine is the top state for female political leadership,

³ For the purposes of this study, time served was calculated to January 3, 2017, the first day of the 115th Congress, to include five newly elected female governors and US senators. The time served for these five female political leaders was set at zero.
followed by Washington State and California. The next tier of five states have FPL scores from 30-39 and include Texas, Kansas, Arkansas, Maryland, and New Hampshire.

At the other end of the Index, ten states had an FPL score of zero. These ten states have never had a female governor or US senator. They include the mountain states of Idaho, Utah, and Colorado, the southern states of Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, and Virginia, and the Great Lakes states of Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.
Party affiliations

While most female elected leaders have been Democrats, there are notable Republican women leaders as well. Among the medium and high scoring states on the FPL Index (10+), twelve are blue states and nine are red (Map 2, US State Voting History by Female Political Leadership). It appears at first glance that both blue states and red states have promoted women, and certainly women have won top political leadership positions in all these states. However, many of the elected female officials in the red states have been Democrats, i.e. Texas (Ferguson, Richards), Kansas (Finney, Sebelius) Arkansas (Caraway, Lincoln), Louisiana (Blanco, Landrieu), Arizona (Napolitano), North Carolina (Perdue, Hagan), and Missouri (McCaskill) (CAWP 2017 a, b).

On the other hand, some prominent Republican elected female officials have served in blue states, i.e. Maine (Collins, Snowe), New Hampshire (Ayotte), and New Mexico (Martinez). This mixed picture highlights the political reality that even though some electorates consistently vote Republican or Democratic in presidential elections, they may vote for a variety of candidates for other offices, including female candidates, a more diverse political geography than an Election Night map suggests.

Political affiliations in the FPL Zero states are similarly mixed. Of the ten states with no high-ranking female political leadership (FPL=0), eight are red states in the southern and mountain states plus Indiana (see Map 2). Two of the FPL Zero states are blue states: Ohio and Pennsylvania. While those states have usually voted for Democratic presidential candidates, they have not followed the Democratic trend in other blue states of electing female political leaders.

The 2016 presidential election

The purpose of devising the Female Political Leadership Index is to assess the likelihood that gender bias played an influential role in the 2016 presidential election in which the female candidate, Hillary Clinton, lost the electoral vote. The paper hypothesis is that states with a higher score on the Female Political Leadership Index were more likely to vote for Clinton. When the results of the 2016 presidential election are examined in the light of this hypothesis, 31 states fit the hypothesis criteria: they had a medium to high FPL score (10+) and voted for Clinton, the
female candidate (11 states); or they had a low FPL score (<10) and voted for Trump, the male candidate (20 states). Nineteen states did not fit the hypothesis: they had a low FPL score (<10) but nonetheless voted for Clinton (9 states); or they had a medium to high FPL score (10+) but nonetheless voted for Trump (10 states) (see Map 3, 2016 US Presidential Election Results By Female Political Leadership).

So on initial appraisal, there is some support for the hypothesis although the results appear mixed.

To assess the likelihood that gender bias played an influential role in the presidential election, we can consider the states by FPL score and voting history. First, it is unlikely there was gender bias in the eleven blue states with a medium to high FPL (10+) that voted for Clinton (medium dark and dark blue states on Map 3). These states traditionally voted for the Democratic candidate for president and had a strong record of electing female candidates to high office.

The nine red states with medium to high FPL (10+) that voted for Trump (Alaska, Arizona, Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and North Carolina) are also unlikely to have had gender bias as a significant factor in the election. These nine states had voted for women in high office repeatedly, both for governor and US senator. While they supported Trump in 2016, they were traditional red states in presidential races and it is unlikely that they would have voted for the Democratic ticket. Despite rejecting the female candidate, there is little evidence that gender bias was a significant factor in these states' collective decision-making in 2016.

Two more states of interest are the traditional red states that voted for Clinton, Colorado and Virginia. Both states are FPL Zero states with no history of electing a female governor or US senator. In addition, they have voted for the Republican candidate for president in most of the past seven elections. Yet in 2016, both states switched party allegiance to vote for Clinton. That willingness to cross party lines to vote for a woman indicates that gender bias did not play a significant role in these two states.

Another seven low FPL states (<10) are traditional blue states that voted for Clinton (medium light blue on Map 3). As Democratic states in most of the previous seven elections, these states were likely to vote for Clinton. While they are weak from the perspective of female political

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4 Maine was placed in Clinton's column for purposes of this study since three of its four electoral votes went to Clinton. Unlike most states, Maine allocates its electoral votes proportionately rather than winner-take-all.
leadership, with few female governors or US senators, they all voted for Clinton so one cannot say that gender bias significantly affected their 2016 vote.

Among the other low FPL states (<10), sixteen are traditionally red states that would have been very unlikely to vote for the Democratic candidate. While one cannot say that there is no gender bias in these states - indeed, the low or zero FPL suggests that it is very hard for women to be elected to high office in these states - it is nonetheless unlikely that gender bias significantly affected the outcome of the state vote in 2016.

The remaining five states are all blue states that voted for Trump. One is a high-FPL state, Michigan (FPL=29), that has elected two women to high office in this century, Gov. Jennifer Granholm (2003-2011), and current senator Debbie Stabenow, first elected in 2000 and re-elected twice. At first glance, it seems unlikely that gender bias was involved given the willingness of the state electorate to vote for women in high office. Nonetheless, the margin of victory was razor-thin, just 0.2 percent (Woolley and Peters 2017b), and any reluctance to elect a female president could have been significant.

The other four blue states are all low FPL states that switched their traditional party allegiance to vote for Trump. While these state electorates have shown some willingness to elect women to high office, one cannot rule out gender bias in the 2016 election. Wisconsin has not voted for the Republican presidential ticket in any one of the last seven elections, and Iowa only voted once (in 2004) for the Republican candidate (Woolley and Peters 2017a). While Iowa voted for Trump by a solid margin, over 9 percent, Wisconsin's margin was very thin, 0.7 percent (Woolley and Peters 2017b). Some sentiment that they were not yet ready for a woman president, as Cokie Roberts suggested, might easily have made the difference in Wisconsin. There is a possibility in both Wisconsin and Iowa that gender bias was a significant factor in their electorates' decision to reject Clinton.

The last two blue states are both FPL Zero states, Ohio and Pennsylvania. These states have never elected a woman to high political office and both switched party lines to vote for Trump. Ohio has voted for the Democratic candidate for president in four of the last six elections, choosing the Republican candidate only in 1988 and in 2004, a highly controversial election. In 2016, it voted for Trump by an 8 percent margin. Pennsylvania has not voted for a Republican presidential candidate since 1988 and voted for Trump by just 0.7 percent as in Wisconsin (Woolley and Peters
2017b). Any reluctance to vote for a female president could have made a difference in these states, especially in Pennsylvania. The absence of any high-ranking female office-holders in these two states suggests that gender bias was a real possibility in the 2016 election.

Conclusions

This preliminary study has demonstrated that the movement of female political leaders into high office is a very real phenomenon in the United States. Many state electorates across the nation, both Republican and Democrat, have shown a willingness to put women into high-ranking political positions. The four states with an all-female Senate delegation are especially impressive. In addition, there is evidence that women can attract votes from both sides of the aisle. However, the fact that ten states have never elected a woman to the US Senate or to the governor's office indicates that some state electorates do not trust women with political power. Another nineteen states with low FPL scores have thin or very recent high-ranking female political leadership. Even for those states that have elected women to high office, parity is not on the doorstep. The US Senate has the most women in its history, but that is still only 21 percent, a very long way from 50 percent. A mere 12 percent of governorships are held by women in 2017, just six out of 50 gubernatorial offices.

The methodology of this study has provided a way to assess gender bias in the 2016 presidential election that many hoped would break that highest glass ceiling. The analysis shows that while most state electorates probably were not significantly influenced by gender bias, it cannot be ruled out in five blue states that crossed party lines to vote for the Republican ticket. With thin female political leadership in Iowa and Wisconsin and no high-ranking female office-holders in Pennsylvania and Ohio, gender bias could have been a factor in these traditional Democratic states. Even with good female political representation in Michigan, the very narrow margin there and in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania could have made the difference in the Electoral College vote.

The good news in an otherwise somber Election Night picture for women is that a solid majority of the nation's electorate favored Hillary Clinton. With over 65 million votes for a female president, there is widespread willingness to elect a woman for the highest office. To achieve that
goal, however, the reluctance of some states to consider women in high political office must be addressed.

References


Strengths and Weaknesses: US Female Political Leadership

Abstract: The defeat of Hillary Clinton in the US presidential election dismayed feminists who hoped to elect the first female President. Commentators on the election suggested that voters rejected her candidacy because they were not ready for a female president. This study investigates the possibility that gender bias was an influential factor in voter decision-making in the 2016 election. United States elections, even at the national level, take place state by state, with the candidate competing in fifty state elections to win the presidency. This study examines female political leadership across the fifty states, ranking them by their proven commitment to elect women to high statewide and national office. In contrast to the failure of the United States to elect a female president, many states have elected women as governors, US senators, and US congressional representatives. However, a significant number of states have had no high-level political leadership, including traditionally "blue" states. This pattern suggests that indeed, some states are not yet ready to elect a woman president. To advance women's political opportunities, feminists should seek to expand the number of states willing to elect women to governorships and the US Congress.

Keywords: Political participation. Representation. Gender bias. US presidency.