

Gender, Entry, and Victory in State Legislative Primary Elections

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Abstract

Extant research on gender, context, and representation in the United States reveals women remain underrepresented as candidates, winners, and throughout political institutions. To better understand the sources of these gender gaps, greater consideration must be given to strategic entry decisions in primary elections. We study this question using aggregate data from state legislative primaries from 2001-2015. We find compelling evidence that women's probability of entry and victory in primary contests is affected by district political context—especially women-friendliness and religiosity. These results support the strategic entry hypothesis and provide further evidence that the most significant barriers to the representation of women in American political institutions precede electoral politics.

Analyses of American legislative general elections find that women are more likely to run and win in so-called “female political subcultures” or “women friendly districts” (e.g., Gordon 2016; Ladam, Harden and Windett 2018; Palmer and Simon 2012; Pyeatt and Yanus 2016b; Rule 1981; Smith, Reingold and Owens 2012; Windett 2011). These areas are characterized by their sociodemographic commonalities; they are more diverse, liberal, urban, and educated. Districts where women run and win also tend to be less religious, and in particular, tend to have fewer evangelical Protestant residents (Setzler 2016).

Extant research on general elections suggests that contextual gender gaps in women’s candidacies and victories may be the result of strategic entry decisions. In general, women are less politically ambitious (Lawless and Fox 2005, 2012), less likely to be recruited by party leaders (Crowder-Meyer 2013; Karpowitz, Monson and Preece 2017; Sanbonmatsu 2002) and more risk averse (Kanthak and Woon 2015). They are also more likely to face gender, role, trait, and issue stereotypes (Dolan 2010; Fulton 2014). Contests in areas with a richer history of women’s representation in government and an ample supply of role models increase the probability of future women candidates’ emergence and success, as women may perceive the climate as more hospitable (Ladam, Harden and Windett 2018).

If strategic entry explains some of the variation in female candidacies, the effect of context on candidate emergence should be apparent prior to general elections. In other words, women candidates should be significantly more likely to run in (and win) primary contests in areas where the context is more hospitable to the election of women. To begin to explore the role of context in primary candidate emergence, we use data on state legislative primary contests from 2001-2015. We find evidence that district political context is significantly related to women candidates’ probability of running and winning in primary contests. Specifically, women are more likely to run and win in women friendly and less religious areas. These findings underscore the importance of strategic candidate entry and recruitment and provide further evidence that the most significant barriers to the representation of women in American political institutions precede even primary election contests.

Gender and General Election Outcomes

Many recent analyses have explored the relationship between gender, candidate entry, and

victory in American general elections. These studies have been conducted at the local (Holman 2017; Smith, Reingold and Owens 2012), state (Pyeatt and Yanus 2018), and national (Dolan 2013; Dolan and Lynch 2013; Palmer and Simon 2008, 2012; Setzler 2016; Setzler and Yanus 2015, 2017) levels. They have examined both legislative and executive general elections and considered a wide array of factors that may be related to the descriptive representation of women. Collectively, these analyses have revealed consistent evidence of gender gaps in candidate pools, but less evidence of direct discrimination against women candidates at the ballot box.

Specifically, aggregate analyses demonstrate that women candidates and winners are underrepresented relative to men; thus, a minority of American legislators are women. In 2018, for example, state legislative elections were held in 46 of the 50 states; there were approximately 10,200 major-party candidates (O'Neill and Quist 2018). Approximately 3,400 (34 percent) of these candidates were women. In 2019, 29 percent of state legislators were women. This percentage was lauded by commentators because it outpaced the U.S. Congress, represented a significant gain, and was the first time that more than a quarter of the nation's legislators were women. Still, it reflects a significant absence of gender parity in American legislatures.

Gender gaps in representation, however, are not consistent across the country. Several contextual indicators are highly correlated with gender equity. First, women are more likely to run in areas with histories of electing women (Campbell and Wohlbrecht 2006; Fox and Oxley 2003; Hansen 1997; Smith, Reingold and Owens 2012; Stambough and O'Regan 2007). This is likely influenced by both trailblazer and role model effects. A history of electing women lowers the cost and risk associated with a potential female candidate's entry. In addition, the success of previous women candidates may make party leaders and voters more familiar with and supportive of the idea of a woman candidate and/or representative.

Second, an area's political, sociodemographic, and economic context may also lead to variations in the representation of women. The study of these how these characteristics—including education, liberalism, and urbanization—influence potential women candidates' entry and victory has a long history in gender and politics research (e.g., Gordon 2016; Ladam, Harden and Windett 2018; Rule 1981; Windett 2011). Briefly, these studies find that smaller districts

with more citizens who are more Democratic, liberal, urban, educated, and racially diverse tend to nominate and elect more women (Palmer and Simon 2008; Pyeatt and Yanus 2016b). Scholars posit that these contextual factors foster the development of attitudes more sympathetic to women's rights and result in female political subcultures or "women friendly districts" (Ladam, Harden and Windett 2018; Palmer and Simon 2008). In contrast, areas that have more blue-collar residents, lower incomes, and married women tend to nominate and elect fewer women, presumably because of the absence of these women-friendly attitudes.

Extant research also reveals that fewer women run and are elected in areas with higher proportions of religious adherents (Setzler 2016). This effect is especially pronounced in districts with large evangelical Protestant populations. In contrast, areas with lower concentrations of evangelicals and greater percentages of religious non-adherents are more likely to have women candidates and elected officials. Setzler argues that this is because of many religious organizations' advocacy of policies supporting the preservation of conventional social and gender roles (Kaufmann 2002; Whitehead 2012, 2013; Wilcox, Chaves and Franz 2004). In addition, many contemporary churches maintain male-dominated decision-making structures justified by religious doctrines (Whitehead 2012, 2013).

Despite the presence of persistent, context-dependent gender gaps in the representation of women, analyses of individual vote choice reach differing conclusions. Most notably, Dolan (2014; see also Dolan and Lynch 2015) finds that, after controlling for partisanship and other sociodemographic indicators, there is no evidence of a gender gap in individual vote choice in general elections. She largely attributes the absence of this gap to the influence of partisanship as a heuristic cue. Other studies have shown that this gap is also non-existent among religiously affiliated voters who are most likely to hold gender trait, role, and issue stereotypes. In congressional elections, for example, Setzler and Yanus (2015) find that religious voters were modestly more supportive of Republican women candidates. These findings persist in elections for state executive office (Setzler and Yanus 2017).¹

Considering Primary Elections

To more completely understand patterns of women's representation and underrepresentation, we must look not only at general elections, but also at primary contests (see Lawless and Pearson 2008,

Kanthak and Woon 2015, Barnes, Branton and Cassese 2017, and experimental work by Bauer 2018, Mo 2015, Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian and Trounstein 2019). These one-party races are most candidates' initial point of entry into legislative elections. Thus, examining primaries allows scholars to more fully consider whether candidates and party elites are making strategic calculations about entry contingent on district context or if their entry into and emergence from these contests is affected by other factors.

Women Running and Winning in Primary Elections

A large body of literature supports the case that women are, at all stages, reluctant candidates. First, studies of strategic entry argue that, before a candidate decides to run for office, the costs must outweigh the benefits (e.g., Jacobson 1989; Rohde 1979). However, for potential women candidates, the costs of running—including the effects on their family and children, fears about media attention, and need to raise campaign funds—may appear more daunting than for their male counterparts (Fulton, Maestas, Maisel and Stone 2006; Kanthak and Woon 2015; Ondercin 2017). Each of these calculations may be altered by the context of the district in which a potential woman candidate is considering running for office. In a more hospitable district, a woman's chances of winning and the potential contentiousness of the election may be significantly reduced compared to a less hospitable environment.

Second, even when compared to similarly experienced men, women are less likely to see themselves as qualified for public service, think about running for office, and less willing to become candidates (Lawless and Fox 2005). These gender gaps likely stem from stereotyping and gender role socialization (Lawless and Fox 2015), but their effects may also be magnified by women's self-assessments of how they would be perceived by their electorate and constituents (e.g., Dolan 2010; Hedlund, Freeman, Hamm and Stein 1979; Huddy and Terklidsen 1993). That said, the presence of female role models in more women friendly contexts may mitigate, if not fully eliminate, gender differences in potential candidates' self-perceptions (Ladam, Harden and Windett 2018).

Finally, even if internal obstacles are not sufficient barriers to women's electoral entry, it has been well documented that party organizations at both the state and local level are less likely to recruit women, particularly in areas without a history of electing women and/or with fewer women in party leadership (Crowder-Meyer 2013; Niven 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2002). This obstacle is especially

detrimental to women's candidacies. Research demonstrates that most women must be asked repeatedly before they view themselves as viable candidates; however, when they are actively recruited, women are equally likely to throw their hat in the ring (Lawless and Fox 2012).

We, thus, expect that strategic entry calculations, made by both candidates and party elites, will result in powerful contextual effects on candidate entry and success at even the earliest stages of the electoral process. Specifically, we expect that risk-averse female candidates will be more likely to run and win in party primaries in women-friendly districts, and less likely to run and win in more religious districts.

However, it is also possible that the relative rarity and resultant idiosyncratic nature of contested state legislative primary elections may reduce contextual effects. In other words, few primary elections can truly be called competitive. In any given year, about 40 percent of state legislative general elections are uncontested; the percentage of uncontested races is even higher in the primaries (Greenblatt 2016). Therefore, it is possible that the effect of contextual factors on primary elections, and particularly a candidate's probability of victory, may be diminished.

The Role of Party

The discussion thus far has paid limited attention to party, but there might be differences between Democratic and Republican primaries. As noted by many observers, the growth in female representation in Congress and the state legislatures has been heavily driven by Democratic women. The Democratic advantage in terms of female representatives may be the result of strategic entry calculations made by candidates and party elites based on political context. Popular wisdom suggests that Democratic districts are generally more women friendly (but see Palmer and Simon 2012: 205) and have lower populations of religious adherents, thus potentially increasing a woman candidate's probability of entry and victory.

However, district context may affect Democratic and Republican women similarly; in other words, partisan gaps in the representation of women may be the result of other factors. For example, Republican women face barriers in fundraising (Thomsen and Swers 2017) and must confront popular perceptions that, simply because of their gender, they are more liberal than their male counterparts (Hayes 2011; Pyeatt and Yanus 2016a; Schneider and Bos 2016). This stereotype may be partially

grounded in reality; Thomsen (2015) shows that Republican women are generally closer to the ideological center than to Republican men. And, even when Republican women win their party primaries, they may be more likely to lose close general election contests (Bucchianeri 2018); this prospect may serve as a deterrent at the initial point of entry.

Data and Methods

To conduct our analysis of gender, context, and candidate entry and success, we use data on state legislative primary elections (for both upper and lower houses) from 2001-2015, excluding special elections.² We include both single-member districts and multi-member districts. This decision was made cautiously as the electoral dynamics of multimember districts can be quite different than single member districts. That said, because women are known to more successful in multi-member contests (e.g., Darcy, Welch and Clark 1985; King 2002; Matland and Studlar 1996; Paxton, Hughes and Painter 2010), we felt it important to account for this institutional variation.³

This data is drawn from Steven Rogers' state primary elections dataset. State legislative contests are advantageous for this analysis because they allow us to consider an early point of entry into the political system. These contests also offer a number of theoretical and empirical advantages over their national counterparts, including implications for progressive ambition and policymaking, as well as a greater number of contests and more varied political contexts. A table of summary statistics for all of our analytical variables is available in Appendix Table 1.

Dependent Variables

Consistent with Setzler (2016), the subsequent analyses employ two related, but distinct, dependent variables. This dual dependent variable approach allows us to consider the effects of political context on both women candidates' entry and success. The first variable, *Woman Runs*, measures whether a woman candidate enters a party primary.⁴ The second, *Woman Wins*, considers whether or not a woman won a party primary.⁵

Independent Variables

To gauge the effect of context on women candidates' emergence and victory, we consider two key indicators: a district's women-friendliness and the percentage of residents who are religious

adherents (Mitchell and Monroe 2014; Ondercin and Welch 2009; Pyeatt and Yanus 2020; Setzler 2016). To measure state legislative district women friendliness, we begin with Pyeatt and Yanus' (2016b) measure. This scale, based on Palmer and Simon's (2008, 2012) indicator for U.S. House of Representatives districts, accounts for 13 sociodemographic and political factors demonstrated to predict the election of women.⁶ Districts' values for each of these factors are compared to national medians and awarded a point if they are oriented in a direction that is more positive for the election of women. Higher values, therefore, reflect districts more conducive to women's electoral emergence and success.

In the subsequent analyses, we follow Setzler (2016) and adapt this indicator to a 10-point scale. This measure is relatively normally distributed with a mean of 5.08 and a median of 5. It deviates from the Pyeatt and Yanus (2016b) measure in several significant ways. First, we omit southern, which lacks a meaningful median, choosing instead to use a separate dummy variable for southern districts. In addition, given the powerful influence of party in modern American politics, we model partisanship and ideology separately. While we agree that these factors are predictive of female candidate emergence and success, we are concerned that including them in a scale as dichotomous factors artificially mutes their impact on our dependent variables. We measure partisanship using the percentage of the district's vote received by the Republican candidate in the preceding presidential election. We measure ideology using Tausanovitch and Warshaw's (2013) indicator of constituent policy preferences. This measure ranges from approximately -1 (more liberal) to 1 (more conservative).

To measure religious adherents, we construct an indicator using data from the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), which conducts a decennial census on religion congregations and membership. Adherents, according to the ASARB, include "members, their children, and the estimated number of other participants who are not considered members" (Grammich, Hadaway, Houseal, Jones, Krindatch, Stanley and Taylor 2012a).⁷ The ASARB data is widely accepted and viewed as reliable but is not available at a geographical level below counties (Grammich, Hadaway, Houseal, Jones, Krindatch, Stanley and Taylor 2012a; Jones, Doty, Grammich, Horsch, Houseal, Lynn, Marcum, Sanchagrin and Taylor 2002). However, based on the methodology used in Setzler (2016; see also Adler 2002), we

estimated the number of religious persons in each state upper and lower house district both before and after the 2010 Census and the subsequent redistricting.⁸

Control Variables

In order to assure that our models are fully specified, we have included a variety of controls to account for variation in state legislative institutions and political and district context. Institutionally, a state's legislative professionalism (Squire 2007)—calculated based on factors such as term length, how frequently a legislative body meets, salaries, and legislative staff—may influence a woman's likelihood of running for office and winning election.⁹ Other scholars (e.g., Hogan 2001) suggest a need to consider whether a state legislature has term limits, which were initially touted as a means to create electoral turnover, but have not had a consistent effect on the representation of women (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 2009, Stambough and O'Regan 2007, for an alternative view see Pettey 2017). Additionally, we include dichotomous variables for multi-member districts and upper house districts. We also include a rank measure of women's political participation in the state. This composite measure, compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, accounts for women's representation in government, voter registration and turnout, and training and resources available to potential women candidates (IWPR 2017).¹⁰ Finally, like previous work on primaries (Brady, Han and Pope 2007; Thomsen 2015), we include two controls for primary type. Here, we control for open and closed primaries with semi-open and semi-closed primaries as the baseline category.¹¹

We also consider a number of factors related to partisanship and ideology. In two-party models, we control for Democratic primaries, because we expect that women will be more likely to run these contests. Given the ideological diversity within parties, party-specific analyses also account for the mean ideology of partisans in a state. So, for example, in a Democratic legislative race in Texas, the measure reflects the average ideological score (ranging from roughly -1 to 1, with larger numbers being more conservative) for Texas Democrats.¹²

Finally, we include a series of controls that reflect whether an incumbent is running for reelection. These controls are critically important; the presence of an incumbent often discourages other candidates from entering a race. We measure both whether there is an incumbent running for reelection

in same party as a candidate and whether an incumbent is running for reelection in the other party's primary. We also account for incumbent gender. Thus, our models include measures of male incumbent (same party), male incumbent (other party) and female incumbent (other party). Female incumbents of the same party are the baseline category.

Findings

We begin our analysis by exploring descriptive statistics on gender and candidate entry, both overall and by party. Table 1 reveals that men continue to enter primary contests at much higher rates than women. Approximately two-thirds of all contests included in this analysis featured only a male candidate. No candidates filed in roughly 14 percent of party primaries, meaning that women ran in the remaining approximately 19 percent of contests. These numbers fluctuated significantly by party. As expected, more women ran in Democratic primaries (slightly above 24 percent of contests) than in Republican primaries (slightly above 14 percent of contests).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Running in Primaries

Having confirmed the existence of baseline gender gaps in candidate entry, we move to a more systematic analysis of how women candidates' entry varies with district context. The results of this analysis—overall and by party—are shown in Table 2. Models I-III show the analysis in all primary elections, regardless of the presence of an incumbent candidate, and Models IV-VI remove cases where there is a same-party incumbent.¹³ In both sets of models, as we would expect, women candidates are less likely to emerge in the South and more likely to emerge in multimember districts. Open primaries are generally positive for female candidates. Incumbents, both from the same party and from the opposite party, significantly discourage female candidate entry. The effect of partisanship is significant, but variable by party. Women are less likely to run in more Republican districts, but that relationship is driven by the larger number of female Democratic candidates. In both Democratic and Republican primaries, female candidates are more likely to run in more strongly partisan districts.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

We also find strong evidence that our key contextual indicators—women-friendliness and

religiosity—have statistically and substantively significant effects on women candidates’ entry in both parties. Consider women-friendly districts first. Overall, as shown in the top row of Figure 1a, women are roughly 10 percentage points more likely to emerge as a candidate in the most women-friendly districts when compared to the least women-friendly districts. The magnitude of the effect of women-friendliness is relatively consistent for both Republicans and Democrats, although the baseline likelihood of entry varies. In fact, the predicted probability of a woman entering a Republican primary in the most women-friendly districts is roughly equal (approximately 21 percent) to the predicted probability of a woman entering a Democratic primary in the least women friendly districts. This systematically positive effect of women friendliness appears to be particularistic to women candidates. In equivalent models for men, the effect of women friendliness is often insignificant and highly situational; these models are shown in Appendix Table 12.¹⁴

FIGURE 1A ABOUT HERE

A district’s population of religious adherents has the opposite effect on women candidates’ emergence; the magnitude of this effect is comparatively modest, but statistically significant.¹⁵ As shown in the bottom row of Figure 1a, women are about 1.7 percentage points less likely to emerge in more religious districts. The probability change is somewhat larger for Republicans (2.4 percentage points) than for Democrats (1.2 percentage points), although once again, the baseline probabilities of Democratic women running in primary elections are higher than their Republican counterparts. Women run in Democratic primaries in 25.2 percent of districts with above average levels of religiosity, but in only about 16.4 percent of Republican primaries at below average levels of religiosity.

In summary, the findings of this entry analysis are generally consistent with studies of the effect of political context on the representation of women in general elections. Both Democratic and Republican women are more likely to run in more women friendly and less religious districts. These findings, thus, also provide support for the proposition that the underrepresentation of women in American politics may owe to strategic entry calculations.

A Moment of Caution

While the preceding analyses clearly indicate that contextual effects, especially district women

friendliness, are associated with the likelihood of women candidates' emergence, there may be some concern that the presence of incumbents in primary elections biases outcomes. With that consideration in mind, Figure 1b uses predicted probabilities drawn from Models IV-VI of Table 2 to examine only those cases with no incumbent candidate.¹⁶ The values presented in Figure 1b are almost identical to those observed in Figure 1a. Moving from the least women friendly to the most women friendly district again increases the likelihood of a woman's candidacy by roughly 10 percentage points, with similar effects for Democrats and Republicans. And, as in Figure 1a, women are roughly 1.7 percentage points less likely to emerge in districts with greater percentages of religious adherents. We can, thus, safely conclude that whether or not there is an incumbent in the primary, the likelihood of a woman entering a primary varies with district context, especially women friendliness.¹⁷

FIGURE 1B ABOUT HERE

Winning Primaries

An open question remains about whether district context also influences women candidates' probability of victory. Table 3 is set up similarly to Table 2, except now the dependent variable is whether a woman won a primary election. The results in these analyses are very similar to those presented in the analyses of women candidates' entry. Women are less likely to win in the South and more likely to win in multimember districts.¹⁸ Open primaries are generally positive for women candidates, although closed primaries may be positive for Republican women but negative for Democratic women.¹⁹ The presence of an incumbent also reduces the likelihood of women candidates' victory, which is logical given the disproportionate number of incumbent men and the powerful effects of incumbency. Much like we observed with the entry models, the contextual factors have insignificant or situational effects on male primary victories. Those models are available in Appendix Table 13.

The effects of our key independent variables are illustrated in Figure 2. These results are very similar to those in Figures 1a and 1b and show that the likelihood of a woman winning a primary election varies with district women friendliness and the number of religious adherents. The effect of women friendliness is once again roughly a 10 percentage point increase in a woman's probability of victory across the range of the variable. A standard deviation change in the number of religious

adherents modestly decreases a woman's probability of victory by roughly 2.5 percentage points. These results indicate that district context alters not only the likelihood of a woman running for office but also the likelihood of a woman winning.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Discussion and Conclusion

The preceding analysis finds consistent and compelling evidence that district context is related to American women's probability of entry and victory in state legislative contests. Even after controlling for political and institutional factors, as well as incumbency, women, regardless of party, are approximately 10 percentage points more likely to run and win in the most women friendly districts. Women are also a more modest, but still statistically significant, approximately 2 percentage points less likely to run in more religious districts.

Taken together, these findings provide clear evidence that strategic entry calculations exert a powerful influence on women's choices to run for state legislative office. In particular, women candidates of both parties appear to be seeking out female political subcultures, where prevailing attitudes among voters are more open to and supportive of their candidacies and where there may be a greater number of role models. Such subcultures do not have a similar incentivizing or deterrent effect for male candidates. This observation reaffirms Palmer and Simon's (2012: 205) assertion that women friendliness is not a partisan phenomenon, despite the fact that the most women friendly districts share many of the characteristics typically associated with Democratic support, including urbanism, and racial and ethnic diversity.

The percentage of religious adherents in a district also influences potential women state legislators' strategic entry decisions and probability of winning party primaries. However, these effects are more modest, suggesting that religion alone likely does not make or break a woman's entry decision. Instead, it is one of a panoply of factors considered by strategic, risk averse women. Interestingly, the same cannot be said when studying general elections, whether for state legislatures (Pyeatt and Yanus 2020) or the U.S. House of Representatives (Setzler 2016), where the effects of

religious adherents were much larger (between 6 and 10 percentage points). Further research is clearly necessary to better understand the relationship between gender, religion, and representation in primary elections.

The effect of context on women's strategic entry decisions—and, by extension, their probability of winning state legislative primary elections—underscores the importance of encouraging, inspiring, and recruiting potential women candidates. As the situation stands, strategic, risk averse women are running disproportionately in areas with a history of supporting women candidates and strong attitudes in favor of gender equity. The importance of these districts should not be overlooked—they have played a major role in increasing women's political representation. However, continued progress toward both gender parity and the representation of women from all walks of life will require additional steps to encourage potential women candidates to boldly go where few women have gone before. This may mean both taking on the establishment and running in new areas and different districts or recruiting a broader range of women to run for office.

Extant research suggests several potential courses of action. Simply asking women to run, and doing so repeatedly, can help overcome gender gaps in nascent political ambition (Fox and Lawless 2010). Party leaders—both Democratic and Republican—may play a particularly important role in this process (Crowder-Meyer 2013; Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Sanbonmatsu 2002, 2006). Experimental research conducted with the assistance of a state Republican Party, for example, suggests that written and spoken interventions to encourage the nomination of women at party conventions can significantly narrow the gender gap (Karpowitz, Monson and Preece 2017). There may also be a place for broader reforms related to campaign finance, redistricting, or otherwise altering electoral systems.

The 2020 elections, however, offer some promising signs for the increasing diversity of women's candidacies. In response to the 2018 election, which saw record numbers of women elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, but a decline in the number of Republican women, party leaders mobilized to diversify their candidate pool. As a result, while a majority of women House candidates in March 2020 still identified as Democrats, a record number of Republican women—and more than twice the number in 2016—had declared their candidacies (Gothreau 2020). This suggests that, with

recruitment and proper financial support, for example Rep. Elise Stefanik's (R-NY) newly formed E-PAC, women candidates' strategic calculations can be altered. Even if these women do not win in 2020, their candidacies may inspire or educate future potential women candidates in these districts.

Future Directions

District context—particularly women friendliness—clearly exerts a powerful effect on women state legislative candidates' emergence and victory in primary elections. But, the present analysis can only speak to the existence of these trends; further research is required to fully understand the dynamics of strategic entry, as well as its effect on practical politics. We would also urge other scholars of representation in American politics to consider the factors that underlie strategic entry decisions for other intersectional and historically marginalized groups, including racial and ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ community.

One particularly important question posed by the results of this analysis is whether women candidates' strategic entry is a result of personal calculations, party influence and recruitment, or a combination of these influences. Untangling these factors will likely require a combination of quantitative and qualitative research conducted with potential candidates. If individual considerations about qualifications, voter perceptions, or probability of victory are the primary driving force, what can be done to alter the decisions of well-qualified women who opt out of the process, particularly in the most women friendly areas? On the other hand, what lessons can we learn from women who choose to run even when the context seems unfavorable? And, how do women's calculations compare to those of their similarly-situated male counterparts? Focusing these studies on candidates for local and state office may be particularly fruitful, as it may shed light not only on the initial entry decision, but also the role of progressive political ambition.

If strategic entry decisions are being driven by party leaders, political elites and (a lack of) recruitment, we must ask under what conditions these individuals act as "queenmakers" and what deters them from identifying and supporting qualified women. Is it simply that, in the absence of a female political subculture, there is a lack of women at the top to identify the next generation of women leaders? And, if these women do exist, are they creating opportunities for others, or standing in

their way, as some anecdotal accounts suggest? Are women being recruited in less hospitable areas as sacrificial lambs? The present analysis offers little evidence for this phenomenon, at least in state legislative elections, although previous studies have suggested it may be prevalent in some areas (e.g., Stambough and O'Regan 2007).

Future analyses should also consider how electoral systems and political institutions affect potential women candidates' entry decisions. First, particularly in primary elections, the composition of the electorate may be significant. Our analyses, for example, find that Democratic women are more likely to win in open primaries and less likely to win in closed primaries when compared to semi-closed and semi-open primaries. Republican women, on the other hand, are more likely to win in both closed and open primaries than semi-open and semi-closed primaries. The role of independent and non-affiliated voters, thus, requires further exploration.

Second, we would be remiss to ignore the role of redistricting in shaping strategic entry decisions. As increasingly contentious debates over how districts should be drawn—and who should draw them—sweep the nation, we must ask, for example, if maps drawn by non-partisan redistricting commissions would result in a greater number of districts where the context favors the election of women? Might districts drawn by such commissions upset the political hierarchy enough to create new opportunities or disperse role models in new areas? Or, might more geographically compact districts reduce the number of opportunities for potential women candidates? Even in the absence of this reform, in an age of partisan and racially-conscious redistricting, we must also ask if a state legislature could “gender-mander” districts to increase the probability of electing women. Would such an action serve to increase the representation of women, or would it limit their representation? A strategic entry story heavily influenced by considerations of district context, such as the one told here, suggests that this action could have potentially powerful consequences for political representation.

Table 1: Comparison of Men and Women in State Legislative Primary Elections, 2001-2015

<i>Both Parties</i>	Man Runs	Man Does Not Run
Woman Runs	1.44% (927)	19.10% (12337)
Woman Does Not Run	65.11% (42053)	14.36% (9275)
	<i>Chi² Test</i>	0.00***
<i>Democrats Only</i>	Man Runs	Man Does Not Run
Woman Runs	1.70% (549)	24.16% (7803)
Woman Does Not Run	60.74% (19615)	13.40% (4329)
	<i>Chi² Test</i>	0.00***
<i>Republicans Only</i>	Man Runs	Man Does Not Run
Woman Runs	1.17% (378)	14.04% (4533)
Woman Does Not Run	69.48% (22438)	15.31% (4946)
	<i>Chi² Test</i>	0.00***

Note: All of the percentages are cell percentages. The numbers in parentheses are the number of cases in that cell; ***p<.001, two tailed test.

Table 2: Likelihood of a Woman Running in a State Legislative District Primary Election, 2001-2015

	All Primaries			Open Seat Primaries Only		
	<i>Model I</i> <i>Both Parties</i> <i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Model II</i> <i>Democrats Only</i> <i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Model III</i> <i>Republicans Only</i> <i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Model IV</i> <i>Both Parties</i> <i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Model V</i> <i>Democrats Only</i> <i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Model VI</i> <i>Republicans Only</i> <i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>
Women-Friendliness	0.08 (0.01)***	0.06 (0.01)***	0.10 (0.01)***	0.08 (0.01)***	0.06 (0.01)***	0.08 (0.01)***
Religious Adherents	-0.53 (0.13)***	-0.39 (0.18)**	-0.85 (0.20)***	-0.60 (0.13)***	-0.41 (0.17)**	-0.76 (0.19)***
Rep. Pres. Vt.	-0.91 (0.15)***	-4.15 (0.21)***	3.03 (0.23)***	-0.15 (0.16)	-2.04 (0.22)***	2.00 (0.25)***
District Ideology	0.09 (0.08)	0.03 (0.12)	0.05 (0.13)	-0.05 (0.09)	0.04 (0.12)	-0.23 (0.13)*
State Senate	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	0.04 (0.06)	0.07 (0.04)*	0.07 (0.05)	0.08 (0.06)
South	-0.28 (0.05)***	-0.17 (0.06)***	-0.44 (0.08)***	-0.46 (0.05)***	-0.31 (0.06)***	-0.59 (0.08)***
IWPR Rank	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)***	-0.01 (0.00)***	-0.01 (0.00)***
Term Limits	-0.14 (0.04)***	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.21 (0.06)***	0.18 (0.04)***	0.27 (0.05)***	0.14 (0.06)**
Lege. Professionalism	-0.00 (0.00)**	0.00 (0.00)***	-0.01 (0.00)***	0.00 (0.00)***	0.01 (0.00)***	-0.00 (0.00)
Democratic Primary	0.77 (0.03)***	-	-	0.72 (0.04)***	-	-
Multimember District	1.62 (0.09)***	1.84 (0.13)***	1.47 (0.11)***	1.36 (0.07)***	1.42 (0.09)***	1.33 (0.10)***
State Party Ideology	-	0.20 (0.23)	-0.29 (0.28)	-	-0.46 (0.23)**	-0.01 (0.27)
Closed Primary	0.12 (0.05)***	-0.04 (0.06)	0.27 (0.07)***	0.01 (0.04)	-0.11 (0.06)*	0.12 (0.07)*
Open Primary	0.12 (0.04)***	0.04 (0.05)	0.27 (0.06)***	0.11 (0.04)***	0.08 (0.05)*	0.16 (0.06)***
Male Incumbent (Same Party)	-4.25 (0.10)***	-4.59 (0.11)***	-4.62 (0.18)***	-	-	-
Male Incumbent (Other Party)	-1.62 (0.03)***	-1.20 (0.04)***	-1.25 (0.05)***	-0.58 (0.03)***	-0.45 (0.04)***	-0.37 (0.05)***
Female Incumbent (Other Party)	-1.41 (0.05)***	-0.96 (0.07)***	-0.99 (0.06)***	-0.42 (0.05)***	-0.19 (0.07)***	-0.26 (0.07)***
Constant	-0.29 (0.12)**	1.90 (0.31)***	-1.68 (0.32)***	-1.60 (0.12)***	-0.64 (0.31)**	-2.50 (0.32)***
N	64592	32296	32296	39278	19276	20002
Pseudo R2	0.27	0.32	0.235	0.079	0.093	0.056
% Correctly Predicted	83.21%	82.48%	84.96%	82.37%	78.38%	85.94%
AIC	48193.26	25259.64	21102.07	34345.67	18686.03	15327.97
BIC	48347.58	25402.14	21244.58	34482.92	18811.9	15454.42

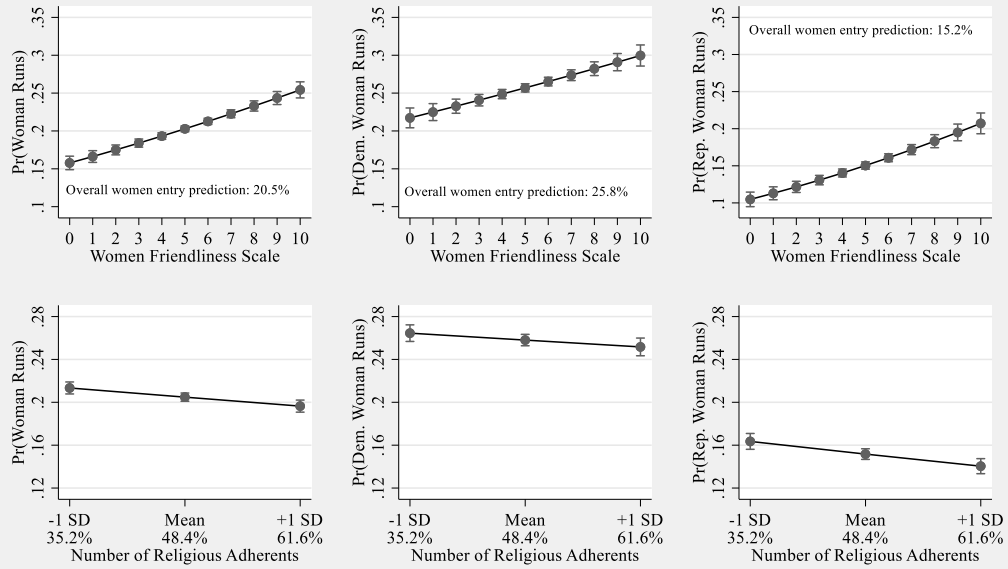
Note: The models presented are logistic regressions with standard errors clustered by state legislative district. The dependent variable is whether or not a woman emerges in a primary in a given district. In the first column, the model may include both a Republican and Democratic primary election in the same state, district, and year. The latter two models are limited by party. The final three models replicate the first three models, except that races with a same-party incumbent seeking reelection are omitted. *p > .10; **p > .05; ***p > .01, two tailed tests.

Table 3: Likelihood of a Woman Winning a State Legislative District Primary Election, 2001-2015

	All Primaries			Open Seat Primaries Only		
	<i>Model I</i>	<i>Model II</i>	<i>Model III</i>	<i>Model IV</i>	<i>Model V</i>	<i>Model VI</i>
	<i>Both Parties</i>	<i>Democrats Only</i>	<i>Republicans Only</i>	<i>Both Parties</i>	<i>Democrats Only</i>	<i>Republicans Only</i>
	<i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>	<i>Coef. (S.E.)</i>
Women-Friendliness	0.08 (0.01)***	0.07 (0.01)***	0.10 (0.01)***	0.08 (0.01)***	0.07 (0.01)***	0.08 (0.01)***
Religious Adherents	-0.55 (0.13)***	-0.36 (0.18)*	-0.87 (0.20)***	-0.65 (0.13)***	-0.43 (0.17)**	-0.83 (0.20)***
Rep. Pres. Vt.	-0.95 (0.15)***	-4.04 (0.21)***	2.80 (0.23)***	-0.23 (0.16)	-1.87 (0.22)***	1.66 (0.25)***
District Ideology	0.13 (0.09)	0.06 (0.12)	0.11 (0.13)	-0.01 (0.09)	0.08 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.13)
State Senate	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.04)	0.04 (0.05)	0.01 (0.06)
South	-0.28 (0.05)***	-0.18 (0.06)***	-0.41 (0.08)***	-0.45 (0.05)***	-0.32 (0.07)***	-0.54 (0.08)***
IWPR Rank	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)*	-0.01 (0.00)***	-0.01 (0.00)***	-0.01 (0.00)***
Term Limits	-0.16 (0.04)***	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.24 (0.06)***	0.17 (0.04)***	0.27 (0.05)***	0.12 (0.07)*
Lege. Professionalism	-0.00 (0.00)**	0.00 (0.00)***	-0.01 (0.00)***	0.00 (0.00)***	0.01 (0.00)***	-0.00 (0.00)
Democratic Primary	0.78 (0.04)***	-	-	0.74 (0.04)***	-	-
Multimember District	1.57 (0.09)***	1.76 (0.13)***	1.44 (0.11)***	1.36 (0.07)***	1.42 (0.09)***	1.31 (0.10)***
State Party Ideology	-	0.06 (0.24)	-0.27 (0.28)	-	-0.57 (0.23)**	0.04 (0.27)
Closed Primary	0.12 (0.04)***	-0.05 (0.06)	0.27 (0.07)***	-0.00 (0.04)	-0.12 (0.06)**	0.11 (0.07)*
Open Primary	0.10 (0.04)***	0.03 (0.05)	0.24 (0.06)***	0.08 (0.04)**	0.06 (0.05)	0.11 (0.06)*
Male Incumbent (Same Party)	-4.57 (0.12)***	-4.92 (0.14)***	-4.85 (0.22)***	-	-	-
Male Incumbent (Other Party)	-1.59 (0.03)***	-1.18 (0.04)***	-1.24 (0.05)***	-0.52 (0.03)***	-0.40 (0.04)***	-0.32 (0.06)***
Female Incumbent (Other Party)	-1.39 (0.05)***	-0.94 (0.07)***	-0.99 (0.07)***	-0.36 (0.05)***	-0.14 (0.07)**	-0.23 (0.07)***
Constant	-0.27 (0.12)**	1.69 (0.31)***	-1.56 (0.32)***	-1.57 (0.12)***	-0.84 (0.31)***	-2.36 (0.32)***
N	64592	32296	32296	39278	19276	20002
Pseudo R2	0.27	0.32	0.23	0.08	0.09	0.05
% Correctly Predicted	83.44%	82.48%	85.42%	82.92%	79.05%	86.59%
AIC	47342.97	24895.93	20767.23	33735.6	18515.9	14966.49
BIC	47497.26	25038.44	20909.74	33872.86	18641.77	15092.94

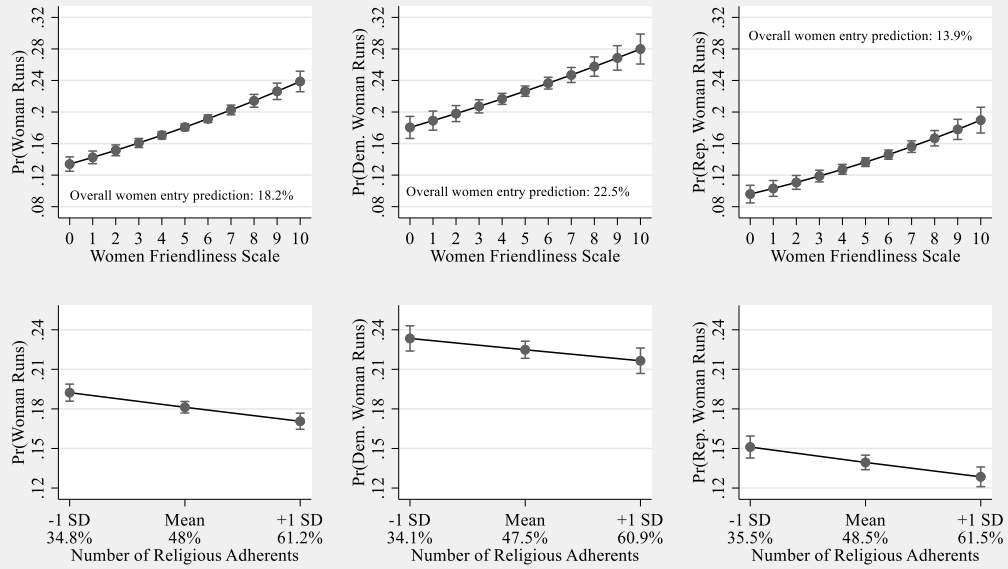
Note: The models presented are logistic regressions with standard errors clustered by state legislative district. The dependent variable is whether or not a woman wins a primary in a given district. In the first column, the model may include both a Republican and Democratic primary election in the same state, district, and year. The latter two models are limited by party. The final three models replicate the first three models, except that races with a same-party incumbent seeking reelection are omitted. *p > .10; **p > .05; ***p > .01, two tailed tests.

Figure 1a: The Probability of a Woman Running for the State Legislature
All Primary Elections 2001-2015
Based District Women Friendliness and the Number of Religious Adherents



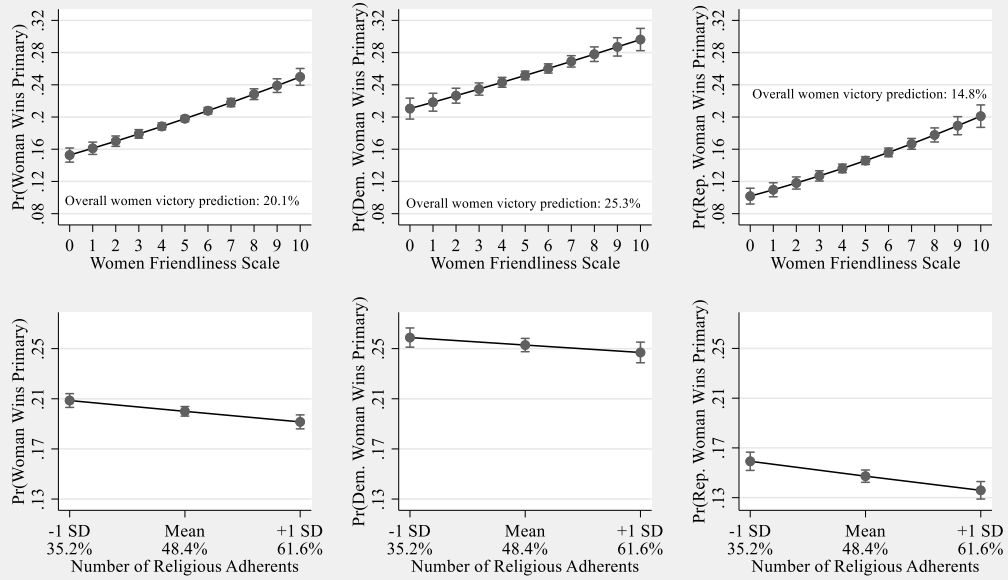
Note: Predicted probabilities drawn from Table 2, Models I-III.

Figure 1b: The Probability of a Woman Running for the State Legislature
 All Primary Elections without an Incumbent, 2001-2015
 Based on District Women Friendliness and Number of Religious Adherents



Note: Predicted probabilities drawn from Table 2, Models IV-VI

Figure 2: The Probability of a Woman Winning a Primary for the State Legislature
All Primary Elections 2001-2015
Based District Women Friendliness and the Number of Religious Adherents



Note: Predicted probabilities drawn from Table 3, Models I-III.

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¹ Recent experimental work by Mo (2015) and Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstein (2019) reveals evidence of gender biases among individuals during elections. However, these authors note that providing voters with information about candidates mitigates some of these biases.

² Louisiana lower houses races are excluded due to that state's November primary election. Races from Nebraska are excluded due to that state's nonpartisan legislature. Elections from the remaining 48 states were used in their entirety, with two exceptions. First, districts were excluded if estimates for district ideology or presidential voting by legislative district were not available; for an explanation of this missing data, see Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013). Second, districts were excluded if state legislative boundaries did not correspond to demographic data from the ACS, which was used to create both the women-friendliness index and the measure of district religiosity. To verify district boundaries, the authors consulted Levitt's (2020) redistricting website. In the end, fewer than a dozen state-chamber-years were omitted (concentrated in states such as Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Texas that had ongoing litigation regarding district boundaries). We have no reason to believe these omissions systematically effect the results of our analyses. Appendix Table 2 summarizes the number of cases used in the analysis by state.

³ We consider districts multi-member if they use a bloc system (voters vote as many times as there are seats). We treat post systems (voters choose a single candidate per post and the district has more than one post) and staggered systems (a district has more than one representative but only one representative is elected) as single member districts because voters get a single vote per position. Alternative analyses that exclude multi-member races have also been conducted; the substantive results are the same. These alternative models are available in Appendix Tables 5 and 6.

⁴ There are a significant number of non-contested state legislative contests. All analyses presented in text have been replicated excluding races with no entrants. These results are broadly comparable and available in Appendix Tables 7 and 8.

⁵ We considered alternate models studying the small number of contests where a woman ran in a primary against a male challenger. The results of these very preliminary models indicate that district women friendliness might help women in those contests. However, given the small number of cases and the significant possibility of selection bias, we do not discuss them here. These preliminary models are available in Appendix Tables 9 and 10.

⁶ These factors are: presidential vote in the most recent election, ideology, percent urban, southern, percent African American, percent Hispanic, percent foreign born, median income, percent college educated (among those over 25), percent school aged, blue collar, and district size in square miles. For more information on the construction of the scale, see Palmer and Simon (2008).

⁷ ASARB further defines adherents as: "...The most complete count of people affiliated with a congregation, and the most comparable count of people across all participating groups. Adherents may include all those with an affiliation to a congregation (children, members, and attendees who are not members). If a participating group does not provide the number of adherents, U.S. Religion Census 2010 may estimate the number of adherents. For groups that report the number of members but not adherents, the general formula for estimating adherents is: Compute what percentage the group's membership is of the county's adult population (14 and older), and then apply that percentage to the county's child population (13 and younger), and then take the resulting figure and add it to the group's membership figure" (Grammich, Hadaway, Houseal, Jones, Krindatch, Stanley and Taylor 2012b).

⁸ This measure was constructed by estimating the percentage of the population from each county in each legislative district. We combined these percentages with data from the 2014 and 2006 ACS. So, if a hypothetical county was divided 65%-35% between District 7 and District 9, the number of religious adherents from the ASARB data was divided 65%-35% into the two districts. Districts that included an entire county received all of values from that county in addition to calculations for any other counties in the district. It is, thus, important to note that these figures are estimates. Apportioning county totals into state legislative districts based on Census data assumes that the distribution of religious persons within the county is roughly similar across the county. In places where individuals of faith are

distributed unevenly, our estimates may be imprecise. That said, this approach is the best currently available estimate of religious persons by legislative district.

⁹ This is a rank measure of legislative professionalism; lower values reflect greater professionalism and higher values reflect less professionalism.

¹⁰ This is a rank measure of women's participation; lower values reflect greater representation of women and higher values reflect less representation of women.

¹¹ The majority of this data come from McGhee, Masket, Shor, Rogers and McCarty (2014). The remainder is supplemented from the *America Votes* series.

¹² This data comes from Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013). The measure's creation is described in Appendix A of their analysis. Unfortunately, this data is only available at single point in time and is not available at a geographic level below the state.

¹³ To enable the inclusion of statewide control variables (i.e., state party ideology, [south](#), etc.), our analyses do not include state fixed effects. We have conducted analyses omitting these controls and using state fixed effects; the results are substantively similar and available in Appendix Tables 3 and 4.

¹⁴ For men, the most important predictor is district partisanship. This finding not only underscores important gender differences in strategic entry decisions, but suggests that women-friendliness measures more than "Democraticness," even in our polarized political climate.

¹⁵ We present predicted probability changes for religious adherents differently than for women friendliness. Over the range of the religious adherents variable, the overall change in predicted probability is 6.4 percentage points, as compared to 9.7 percentage points for women friendliness. However, there are much greater numbers of women-friendly districts at the tails of the distribution than there are districts with very high or very low percentages of adherents. Thus, we follow Setzler (2016) and show values for districts ± 1 standard deviation of the mean level of religious adherents.

¹⁶ The analyses in Models IV-VI of Tables 2 and 3 exclude only races with a same party incumbent. Incumbents of the opposite party are accounted for using control variables. Analyses of races that are both open seats in both the primary and general election are presented in Appendix Table 11. The results are substantively identical to those presented here.

¹⁷ Equivalent models for men are shown in Appendix Tables 12 and 13. Even after accounting for incumbency, district women friendliness does not exert a similar effect on male candidate emergence.

¹⁸ It is challenging to study the effects of multi-member districts on candidate victory because there can be more than one winner. The key comparison in these contests, thus, is not between whether a man or woman wins, but whether a woman does or does not win. Excluding multi-member districts, as previously noted, does not change the substantive conclusions; these models are available in Appendix Tables 5 and 6.

¹⁹ The comparison category is semi-open and semi-closed primaries.