News Media Reporting of United States Senate Campaigns:

The Role of Gender in Local Television Coverage of Elections from 2006 to 2014

By

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A Thesis submitted to  
The Department of Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

MIAMI UNIVERSITY

Oxford, Ohio

May 27, 2016

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The persistent underrepresentation of women in American political institutions, despite the evolution of cultural attitudes toward women in politics, both merits and necessitates the extensive body of research that explores gender bias in the electoral arena. While overt sexism and gender bias in the media are generally considered rare, women remain severely underrepresented at every level of public office. Analyses reveal that the media depicts female candidates for elective office differently than their male counterparts. Such portrayals reinforce gender stereotypes, thus delegitimizing women’s viability as candidates (Kahn, 1996).

Research has long suggested that gender cues and stereotypes play a key role in shaping voters’ perceptions of female candidates for elected office. However, recent studies indicate that media coverage of female candidates may be improving (Hayes & Lawless, 2015). In addition, survey research suggests that Americans have become increasingly acceptant of women in the political sphere (Brooks, 2014; Dolan, 2001). Despite these findings, women remain severely underrepresented at every level of public office in the United States (Center for American Women and Politics, 2016).

The dearth of women who hold electoral office makes the presence of a female candidate on the ballot especially salient to journalists. Women’s unusual preference could potentially promote gender stereotyping since stereotyping is more common in situations where a characteristic such as sex is more prominent (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Given the public’s heavy reliance on the news for political information and the media’s control over the amount and type of content voters acquire during campaigns, gender differences in election coverage can be consequential (Ditonto, Hamilton, & Redlawsk, 2014; McDermott, 1997). Differences in the media’s coverage of party nominees run the risk of adversely affecting voters’ overall impressions of female candidates in a myriad of ways, including candidate recognition, perceptions of issue stances and positions, and personality assessments, as well as evaluations of viability (Fridkin & Kittilson, 2008; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). As long as the media continues to operate with a gendered lens, women’s presence in the political arena may remain stagnant despite the significant strides they have made in the professional and societal domains.

**Women in American Politics**

Gender plays an undeniably important role in United States politics and elections. Female legislators’ have a greater likelihood to champion women’s interests (Bratton, 2005; Brown, 1977; Swers, 2002, 2013). Their presence in the political arena, according to Lawless and Fox, “infuses into the legislative system a distinct style of leadership” (2010). Women’s approach to governing, Rinehart posits, emphasizes congeniality and cooperation whereas men tend to stress hierarchy (1991).

Historically, women served in Congress only as widows of congressmen. It was not until 1978, with the successful election of Nancy Kassebaum to the U.S. Senate, that a woman’s political career was attributed to her own merit rather than the death of her spouse (Gertzog, 1995). The public’s attitude toward women has drastically shifted over time. Most recent polls indicate that 80% of Americans think the country is ready for a woman president—up 10% in the past decade. In addition, when asked whether they would vote for a generally well-qualified woman candidate if nominated by their political party for the 2016 presidential election, 92% of Americans said yes. The public’s increasing acceptance of women in the political sphere has not been congruent with the emergence of greater numbers of female candidates for elective office.

Even with the general increase in acceptance among the general public, analyses reveal that perceptions of women and men in politics differ in terms of their ideologies, traits, and expertise. Voters tend to view male candidates as more assertive and confident and women candidates as compassionate and willing to compromise (Fowler & Lawless, 2009; Lawless, 2004; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Sapiro, 1981). As social stereotypes fuel these patterns, traditional roles and expectations of women continually permeate the political arena, thus affecting voters’ support for candidates (Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Voters, rather than evaluating candidates by their stances on issues, rely heavily on various heuristics, of which “gender serves as one of the most straightforward” (Hayes & Lawless, 2015).

Women chose to run for elective office at much lower rates than men perhaps because of a "perception gap" in political ambition whereby women with substantial professional experience are unlikely to see themselves as fit for electoral office (Pearson & McGhee, 2013). On the other hand, men, with no experience, are significantly more likely to both identify as qualified for office and to run for election (Fox & Lawless, 2010).

The perception gap phenomenon is better exemplified in Lawless and Fox’s cross-sectional study of over 2,000 equally credentialed men and women. They found that women of high professional achievement are significantly less likely than men to view themselves as qualified to run for elective office and so are less likely to do so (2010). Women are also more likely to “perceive the electoral environment as highly competitive and biased against female candidates” (Lawless & Fox, 2005; Thomas & Wilcox, 2014). Most importantly, research reveals that the gender gap in political ambition “persists across generations and over time” (Fox & Lawless, 2010). This is not to argue that men do not encounter obstacles to entry, but “rather that women face an additional set of barriers or face the same obstacles in a different way as a result of their gender” (Schwindt-Bayer & Squire, 2014). In sum, women’s interrelated political interests and distinct style of leadership necessitates their equal representation in the American political arena.

**The Media as an Institutional Obstacle**

Women’s increased success in entering and succeeding in federal, state, and local legislatures is indicative of a substantial degree of political reciprocity to their presence and priorities. Meanwhile, “a host of evidence catalogs persistent institutional resistance to women’s progress toward parity” (Thomas & Wilcox, 2014). The news media serves as a potentially powerful source for resisting the progress of women’s success in politics. Television news, in particular, has the power to “play upon the audience’s emotions” (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In its ability to evoke emotion, television media drastically stimulates the public’s understanding of political affairs. Moreover, Americans believe television provides the most intelligent and neutral coverage of all news mediums. Such evidence indicates that media produces attitudes of bias or judgment (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Media coverage of candidates’ traits and issue positions primes voters to use those issues and traits in their candidate evaluation (Druckman, Jacobs, & Ostermeier, 2004). Thus, to the extent that media focuses on stereotypical “feminine” traits and issues that are devalued for success in public office when covering female candidates, women will be disadvantaged. Evidence suggests that the media does indeed tend to concentrate more on women’s family responsibilities than on men’s, particularly through coverage of candidates’ press releases (Fridkin & Woodall, 2005). This is evident, for example, in the news media’s coverage of the two most recent presidential elections, through a comparison of Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin, who has five children, compared to that of 2012 Republican vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan, who has three children (Thomas & Wilcox, 2014). The news media’s portrayals of candidates in U.S. Senate races potentially reinforce voters’ perceptions of gender differences among politicians (Atkenson & Krebs, 2008).

**Prior Research**

The notion that the U.S. media’s portrayal of women running for electoral office is different in consequential ways is disputed. Extensive studies conducted in the early 1990s examining coverage of female candidates found that newspapers reinforce gender stereotypes by emphasizing “feminine traits” and “feminine issues”, meanwhile delegitimizing their viability as candidates (Kahn, 1991; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991). Studies conducted since have both confirmed many of these findings and indicated that media coverage of female candidates might be improving (Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart, 2003). A study of newspaper coverage of U.S. Senate and governor candidates in the 2000 primary races found that “women received more coverage than did men in terms of quantity and that the quality of their coverage” yet, “female candidates were much more likely to be discussed in terms of their role as mothers and their marital status, which can affect their viability with voters” (Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart, 2001).

Female candidates continuously condemn the press as a major obstacle to their success and scholars generally agree that the media treats female candidates differently than their male counterparts (Fox & Lawless, 2011). While studies such as Hayes and Lawless’ (2015) and Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson’s (2003) suggest that the media’s treatment of female candidates is more equitable, most literature concludes that “different and extra efforts are required of women candidates” in winning elections (Thomas & Wilcox, 2014).

Most research on gender disparities in media coverage still concentrates on elections spanning from the 1990s to early-2000s, yet data reveals that gender discrimination has become subtle in recent years (Fowler & Lawless, 2012; Hayes & Lawless, 2015). There is a need for new research designed to better detect subtle gendered statements and stereotypes.

Extensive research has shown clear media bias in coverage of elections with female candidates. Biases have been studied within a variety of outlets, including political advertisements, nationally televised news, local and national print media and more, yet none have extensively analyzed local broadcast television’s coverage of or effect on U.S. Senate elections and outcomes. As the majority of voters’ information is obtained through the media, “making news coverage a critical source of information in the vast majority of American political campaigns … especially in the relatively low-profile campaigns that characterize most American elections, a disproportionate share of what voters know about their electoral choices comes from the local news media” (Hayes & Lawless, 2015). Moreover, “compared to newspapers, television news content supposedly emphasizes individuals' attributes such as political candidates' personalities at the expense of issue coverage” (Druckman, 2005).

The vast majority of existing research focuses on statewide races with relatively few female candidates. Among the most comprehensive in the field is Kahn’s 1996 study on media coverage of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial campaigns, yet it is based on only 22 female candidates (Kahn, 1996; Hayes & Lawless, 2015). Studies show that Americans trust the information they receive from local TV news stations to a greater degree than any other source of news (American Press Institute, 2014). An examination of local news coverage of elections is capable of increasing the number of female candidates analyzed.

Among the different types of TV news, more Americans (82 percent) turn to their local TV news stations, either through the TV broadcast or online, than any other type (American Press Institute, 2014). While research suggests that local television news is often perceived as less critical of candidates and campaigns than network television, no studies have examined this phenomenon in-depth. Political information obtained through television news has been proven to significantly predict citizens’ knowledge of candidates (Leshner & McKean, 1997).

A study of local television coverage of U.S. Senate general elections with the presence of a woman on the ballot will provide deeper insight into how, if at all, attention to traits and issues is different or biased against female candidates.

**Hypotheses** Consistent with the existing research that suggests the news media stereotypes female candidates, associating them with stereotypically female traits and issues and male candidates with stereotypically male traits and issues, I propose the following hypotheses:

* 1. *Hypothesis 1:* General elections with two female candidates will receive less news coverage than elections with one male candidate.
  2. *Hypothesis 2:* Male candidates will receive more news coverage than female candidates on issues pertaining to defense, security and military, taxes and spending, the economy, and foreign affairs.
  3. *Hypothesis 3:* Female candidates will receive more news coverage than male candidates on issues pertaining to race and social groups, civil and social order, social welfare, and government functioning.
  4. *Hypothesis 4:* Media will associate female candidates with positive “feminine traits,” i.e., ethical, compassionate, more than male candidates.
  5. *Hypothesis 5:* Media will associate female candidates with negative “feminine traits,” i.e., not engaged, dishonest, more than male candidates.
  6. *Hypothesis 6:* Media will associate male candidates with positive “masculine” traits, i.e., dedicated and ambitious, more than female candidates.
  7. *Hypothesis 7:* Media will associate male candidates with negative “masculine” traits, i.e., ineffective, combative, more negatively than female candidates.

**Methods**

To determine whether there are differences in how male and female U.S. Senate candidates are covered, I analyzed local television broadcasts coverage of elections in which there was at least one female candidate from 2006 to 2014, a total of 57 races (excluding Montana’s 2014 Senate election.[[1]](#endnote-1)) For each state holding a U.S. Senate general election with at least one female candidate, Media Library Inc. provided “streamlined text reports”, synopsized closed caption text of news stories, from all major news media markets in each state. The database contains all television programming from September 1 through the election date. By examining five election cycles, I can also control for political climate, i.e. the presence of a presidential election, incumbency, and competitiveness. Elections were coded as competitive when a candidate won with less than 10% of more votes than his or her opponent. Any election that occurred in 2008 or 2012 was coded to control for any changes in coverage that may occur in the presence of a presidential election. Any candidate who had served at least one term prior in the Senate was coded as an incumbent.

Within the 57 elections analyzed, 47 of the candidates were men and 66 were women (for a full list of candidates see Table A3).[[2]](#endnote-2) A candidate’s opponent often dictates his or her campaign (Dolan, 2005). In order to examine how female candidates irrespective of political party are covered, nine of the total races analyzed were woman v. woman. In the sample, 24 of the female candidates were Republican and 42 were Democrats. Twenty-two of the female candidates were incumbents; three Republicans and 19 Democrats had served at least one term prior to the election. Of all the candidates, 14 Republican and 25 Democrat women won their elections.

Media Library’s data captures two to three sentences surrounding mentions of each candidate’s name. While I was unable to determine the length of the stories given the nature of the data, the database does contain records of clips’ placement within each story. Due to Media Library’s methodology in capturing broadcasts, parts of the analyzed transcripts are missing. Given that data is limited to a number of sentences, is possible that my findings *underreport* existing gender bias. Despite the fact that these reports are not the complete text of each story (such data do not exist), I believe that the novelty of the data and its impossible-to-get nature as well as the increased difficulty the data poses in rejecting the null hypothesis of no bias compensates for this shortcoming.

Political advertisements were disregarded unless they were played during news broadcasts covering the campaign. Similarly, debates and speeches, if transcribed without political commentary, were not included in the analysis. Our analysis does, however, include clips in which news broadcasters specifically pointed to comments made during debates or speeches. In the end, I had an average of 1321.973 clips per candidate. I used the average number of clips to test Hypothesis 1. For all candidates, this measure ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 6123.

The independent variables are candidate gender, candidate party identification, opponent’s gender, election cycle, i.e., midterm election, competitiveness, and incumbency. The dependent variables are the number of articles dedicated to each candidate, traits and issue type.

Female and male issues were coded using Hayes and Lawless’ (2015) issue categories (see Table A1 for the list of issues). In our findings, I group “women’s issues” with race and social groups, civil and social order, social welfare, and government functioning issue categories, given that women are typically viewed as more competent in handling such issues than men (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Sapiro, 1981). I recorded the total number of mentions of each issue type for each story and then summed the total number of mentions of each issue type for each candidate. For all candidates, this measure ranged from a low of zero to a high of 50. To control for variation in the number of total ads between candidates, I scaled the sums by dividing by the total number of stories for each candidate. For example, candidate Carly Fiorina in 2010 was associated with “women’s issues” 11 times divided by the total number of stories she was mentioned in, 4614. These measures allowed me to test Hypotheses 2 and 3.

I examined the impact of candidate gender on trait inferences, often determined to be the basis of issue stereotyping (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Hayes & Lawless, 2015). Using Kinder’s (1986) research, I analyzed specific references to candidates’ traits, the second dependent variable tested. Each trait fell under one of four dimensions: leadership, integrity, competence, and empathy. Using a list of traits commonly used in prior research, each trait reference was placed under one of the four dimensions. It was then coded as either negative or positive (Hayes & Lawless, 2015), resulting in eight dependent variables: positive and negative leadership, positive and negative integrity, positive and negative competence, and positive and negative empathy traits (for further examination of these categories see Table A2). These variables were summed and scaled in the same manner as the issues. For all candidates, total mentions of positive leadership traits ranged from zero to 13. For example, candidate Kay Hagan in 2014 was associated with positive leadership traits four times out of a total of 187 clips. Her scaled number for this trait would be (4/187). Variation in trait measures allows me to test Hypotheses 4, 5, 6 and 7.

**Results**

I began by testing Hypothesis 1 through an examination of the pure quantity of coverage devoted to elections. The data presented in Table 1 depicts how quantity of coverage is influenced by my key independent variable of gender along with the following control variables: political party, incumbency, competitiveness, and year in which the race took place.[[3]](#endnote-3) Table 1 provides the results of an OLS regression of candidate gender and party identification, opponent gender, election cycle, competitiveness, and incumbency to explain the variation in number of candidate mentions. Candidates had significantly more stories dedicated to them when the election was competitive. Candidates were mentioned marginally less if their race occurred during a presidential election cycle and were mentioned marginally more if they were an incumbent or a Democrat (see Table 1). The findings displayed in Table 1 neither support nor refute Hypothesis 1. While the results indicate that female candidates receive less coverage than men, and that even less coverage is dedicated to woman versus woman races, these findings are not statistically significant. Therefore, I cannot conclude that women received less coverage than their male counterparts.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

An examination of issues and trait coverage, tests of Hypotheses 2 through 7, however, reveals noteworthy gender differences. Table 2 includes the results of five separate regressions of masculine issue categories, testing Hypothesis 2 which states that male candidates were expected to be associated more with these issues than female candidates: the first column results are from a regression of “men’s issues,” the second are of defense, security, and military, the third of are of taxes and spending; the fourth are of economy, and the fifth are of foreign affairs. These dependent variables were regressed on the same independent variables as in testing Hypothesis 1: candidate gender and party identification, opponent gender, election cycle, competitiveness, and incumbency. The results suggest that coverage of candidate’s positions on stereotypically “men’s issues” varies significantly based on candidate gender (see Table 2). The results of the regression of defense, security and military issues support Hypothesis 2. Female candidates receive marginally less coverage on issues relating such issues than male candidates. However, in female versus female races, significantly more coverage is devoted to candidates’ focus on “men’s issues” and defense, security, and military issues. These findings refute Hypothesis 2. It is possible these findings are the result of the relatively small sample size of woman versus women elections included in the study and that these findings are anomalous. They may also be attributed to the nature of the specific and small number of woman versus woman elections analyzed; defense, security and military issues may have been more salient to voters during some of these races which were high-profile; for example California’s 2010 election between Carly Fiorina and Barbara Boxer. A deeper understanding of these findings would require additional data analysis.

<Insert Table 2 about here>

In testing Hypothesis 3, I find no gender difference in coverage of candidates’ position on “women’s issues” (see Table 3). Table 3 includes the results of five separate regressions of issue categories: the first column results are from a regression of “women’s issues,” the second are of race and social groups, the third are of civil and social order, the fourth are of social welfare, and the fifth are of government functioning. Results from this table neither support nor refute Hypothesis 3. One possible explanation for this is that local news media is simply less biased than prior research has led us to believe newspaper coverage is. Another explanation could be that both women and men did not emphasize their positions on such issues, and the media subsequently did not cover them. Tables 5 and 6 display frequency distributions of news coverage mentions of stereotypical “women’s issues” and “men’s issues” by candidate gender, respectively. Because each issue category is covered at about the same frequency, further analysis is necessary here (see Tables 5 and 6).

<Insert Table 3 about here>

Results on the impact of gender on trait mentions reveal important findings as well (see Table 4). The results of regressions on traits support Hypotheses 4, 5, 6, and 7, where I speculate that female candidates would receive more mention of positive and negative female-stereotypical traits and less mention of positive and negative male stereotypical traits. Consistent with previous research, female candidates receive significantly more mentions of positive empathy traits as compared to men. Female candidates also receive substantially less mentions of positive leadership than male candidates. In elections with two female candidates, however, news coverage is far more likely to attribute candidates with positive competency traits. These findings refute the aforementioned hypotheses, and contradict the existing research that links competency and leadership traits with male candidates.

<Insert Table 4 about here>

One explanation could be that since women do not run unless they are highly qualified and most Senate candidates are also highly qualified, coverage of them does tend to focus on their often-exemplary qualifications (Lawless & Fox, 2010). One might think that the female-female races are confounded with competitiveness and therefore, interpretation would be flawed; however, only two of the nine woman v woman races met our definition of competitiveness. Thus, it seems that woman v woman races are more likely to receive mentions of positive competency traits.

**Discussion**

Gender bias in media coverage of elections has long been studied through print news on the basis that television transcripts are difficult to find. Local television’s influence on voters may be significant; a more extensive analysis of its coverage and effects is warranted. Despite the shortcomings of the dataset, I believe the findings present an interesting framework for further analysis.

The results of a content analysis indicate that female candidates are just as likely to receive coverage as their male counterparts at the aggregate level. Tests of Hypothesis 1 are consistent with prior research showing equal media coverage, in quantity, of female and male candidates (Lawless & Hayes, 2015; Fowler & Lawless, 2009).

The results pertaining to issue coverage are varied, both refuting Hypothesis 3 and providing a degree of support for Hypothesis 2. My findings reveal a lack of significant gendered difference in issue coverage, consistent with existing research that suggests that coverage of issues is more equally distributed across gender when a woman is present in a race (Atkeson & Krebs, 2008). Given that my analysis includes broadcasters’ references to sound bites and political advertisements, candidates may have a high level of influence in their issue coverage. It is possible that coverage reflected female and male candidates’ equal emphasis of “women’s issues,” as research shows that there is no significant difference in female and male candidates’ issue emphasis on their campaign websites (Dolan, 2005). Female candidates may also be purposefully averse to actively promoting their stance on “women’s issues,” as research shows that voters tend to affiliate such campaigns with ineffective candidates (Larson, 2001).

Findings reveal that positive empathy traits are significantly more likely to be linked to female candidates, supporting Hypothesis 4. However, the results show that media coverage does not attribute women with positive integrity traits or negative empathy and integrity traits more often than their men, refuting Hypothesis 5 and decreasing support for Hypothesis 4.

In support of Hypotheses 6 and 7, the results suggest that local television news media discusses “masculine” traits more with male candidates. Similar findings are evident in existing literature. Kahn’s (1994) analysis compares female and male candidates’ press coverage in comparison to their political advertisements. In her analysis of the press’ coverage of candidates’ traits in Senate elections, Kahn finds that there is “somewhat more discussion of ‘male’ traits for men” (Kahn, 1994).

My examination of local television news coverage of Senate candidates reveals gender differences but these differences are not systematically biased against female candidates. The analysis reveals that news media covered female and male candidates in equal numbers, with largely similar numbers of issue and trait mentions. Given the time and technical restraints, there are a number of important limitations to this study that would be useful for scholars to explore.

One suggestion for future research is to develop a text-mining program capable of eliminating advertisements and coding at an increased rate. It would be particularly interesting and potentially cutting-edge to study horserace coverage in local television coverage. Many of the clips pertained to polling, using phrases such as “statistical dead heat.” Additional variables to code for include mentions of candidates’ appearance, family or spousal roles, prior experience, and viability. An examination of additional characteristics of the candidate, e.g. length of Senate incumbency, would also be interesting to analyze. With additional resources, future research can also discern broadcasters’ references to negative advertisements, sound bites during debates and speeches, and political endorsements. I was unable to analyze these variables due to both the size of the dataset and time constraints. More resources, such as a data-mining program or several more coders are essential in analyzing the existing dataset to its true capability.

In addition, it is important to consider different modeling techniques that might be more appropriate than ordinary least squares regression. OLS regression may not be the most appropriate modeling strategy because there are so few instances of trait and issue mentions. Perhaps using a rare events model or a model that predicts the presence or absence of any traits in a particular category, such as using maximum likelihood estimation, could be fruitful.

In closing, media coverage of elections has the potential to limit descriptive representation of women. Research should continue to examine how the media portrays female candidates, as biased news coverage may affect election outcomes or reinforce gender stereotypes, diminishing women’s inclination to run for office. This study provides a framework for future scholars to continue to examine the media’s influence on women’s political careers.

Appendix A

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| --- | --- |
| **Table 1. Gender and news media coverage of U.S. Senate elections (Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors)** | |
|  | Number of Stories |
| Female Candidate | -28.381 (248.7737) |
| Female Opponent | -57.510 (319.513) |
| Incumbent | 388.519+ (227.074) |
| Democrat | 145.203+ (230.244) |
| Competitiveness | 1664.567\*\* (248.562) |
| Presidential Cycle | -152.469+ (227.669) |
| Constant | 752.059\*\* (215.209) |
| Adjusted R2 | 0.277 |
| N | 113 |

Levels of significance: \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05 and +p < 0.1.

Note: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2. Local News Mentions of Men’s Issues (Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors)** | | | | | |
|  | “Men’s Issues” | Defense, Security, Military | Taxes and Spending | Economy | Foreign Affairs |
| Female Candidate | -0.001 (0.001) | -0.001+ (0.001) | 0.0002 (0.001) | 0.023 (0.015) | 0.007 (0.005) |
| Female Opponent | 0.003\*\* (0.001) | 0.004\*\* (0.001) | 0.001 (0.001) | -0.021 (0.020) | -0.007 (0.007) |
| Incumbent | -0.0004 (0.001) | -0.001 (0.001) | -0.0001 (0.001) | -0.008 (0.014) | 0.0001 (0.005) |
| Democrat | 0.0002 (0.001) | 0.001 (0.001) | -0.001 (0.001) | -0.021 (0.014) | -0.008 (0.005) |
| Competitiveness | -0.001 (0.001) | -0.001 (0.001) | -0.001+ (0.001) | -0.017 (0.015) | -0.005 (0.005) |
| Presidential Cycle | -0.001 (0.001) | -0.001+ (0.001) | 0.002\* (0.001) | 0.023 (0.014) | 0.006 (0.005) |
| Constant | 0.002\*\* (0.001) | 0.003\*\* (0.001) | 0.002\*\* (0.001) | 0.010 (0.013) | 0.004 (0.005) |
| Adjusted R2 | 0.076 | 0.102 | 0.044 | 0.020 | -0.003 |
| N | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 |

Levels of significance: \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05 and +p < 0.1.  
Note: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 3. Local News Mentions of Women’s Issues  (Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors)** | | | | | |
|  | “Women’s Issues” | Race and Social Groups | Civil and Social Order | Social Welfare | Government Functioning |
| Female Candidate | -0.001 (0.002) | -0.002 (0.003) | -0.002 (0.001) | 0.023 (0.015) | 0.0002 (0.001) |
| Female Opponent | 0.001 (0.002) | -0.003 (0.004) | -0.0005 (0.002) | -0.020 (0.020) | 0.0003 (0.001) |
| Incumbent | -0.001 (0.002) | -0.001 (0.003) | -0.0009 (0.001) | -0.010 (0.014) | -0.0001 (0.001) |
| Democrat | -0.0004 (0.002) | -0.001 (0.003) | 0.0004 (0.001) | -0.020 (0.014) | 0.0004 (0.001) |
| Competitiveness | -0.002 (0.002) | -0.002 (0.003) | -0.0004 (0.001) | -0.017 (0.015) | -0.001 (0.001) |
| Presidential Cycle | 0.001 (0.002) | -0.002 (0.003) | -0.001 (0.002) | 0.023 (0.014) | 0.001 (0.001) |
| Constant | 0.004\* (0.002) | 0.006\* (0.003) | 0.003\* (0.001) | 0.010 (0.013) | 0.001 (0.001) |
| Adjusted R2 | -0.030 | -0.032 | -0.037 | 0.010 | 0.009 |
| N | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 |

Levels of significance: \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05 and +p < 0.1.  
Note: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 4. The Impact of Candidate Gender on Trait Mentions in Local Television Coverage of U.S. Senate Elections (Ordinary Least Squares Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors)** | | | | | | | | |
|  | Negative Competence | Positive Competence | Negative Empathy | Positive Empathy | Negative Leadership | Positive Leadership | Negative Integrity | Positive Integrity |
| Female Candidate | 0.008 (0.005) | -0.001 (0.002) | -.00009 (.00008) | .001\* (.0005) | 0.0001 (0.0001) | -0.001\*\* (0.0004) | -0.0002 (0.0002) | 0.0001 (0.0001) |
| Female Opponent | -0.008 (0.007) | 0.007\*\* (0.002) | -.00004 (.0001) | -0.0007 (0.0006) | 0.0002 (0.0002) | -0.0003 (0.001) | -0.0001 (0.0002) | -0.0002 (0.0001) |
| Incumbent | -0.002 (0.005) | -0.002 (0.002) | .0001 (.00007) | 0.0002 (0.0004) | -0.00001 (0.0001) | 0.001\*\* (0.0004) | -2.85e-06 (0.0002) | 0.0001 (0.0001) |
| Democrat | -0.007 (0.005) | 0.003 (0.002) | -.0001 (.00008) | -0.00006 (0.0004) | -0.0002 (0.0001)+ | 0.001\* (0.0004) | 0.002 (0.0002) | 9.07e-06 (0.0001) |
| Competitiveness | -0.005 (0.005) | -0.001 (0.002) | . 00009 (.00008) | 0.0003 (0.0005) | 0.00007 (0.0001) | 0.0004 (0.0004) | 0.0002 (0.0002) | 0.0001 (0.0001) |
| Presidential Cycle | 0.007 (0.005) | -0.002 (0.002) | . 00005 (.00007) | 0.0004 (0.0004) | 0.00008 (0.0001) | 3.53e-06 (0.0004) | 0.0002 (0.0002) | 0.0001 (0.0001) |
| Constant | 0.002 (0.004) | 0.001 (0.002) | .0002\*\* (.00007) | 0.00002 (0.0004) | 0.0001 (0.0001) | 0.007\* (0.0003) | 0.0001 (0.0001) | 1.523-06 (0.0001) |
| Adjusted R2 | 0.006 | 0.052 | 0.036 | 0.002 | 0.021 | 0.150 | 0.028 | -0.019 |
| N | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 |

Levels of significance: \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05 and +p < 0.1.  
Note: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

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| **Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Women’s Issue Category Mentions by Candidate Gender** | | | | | | |
|  | | “Women’s Issues” | Race and Social Groups | Civil and Social Order | Social Welfare | Government Functioning |
| *No Mentions* | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Female Candidate | 51.52% | 46.97% | 54.55% | 30.30% | 59.09% |
|  | Male Candidate | 63.83% | 53.19% | 70.21% | 38.30% | 55.32% |
|  | Total | 56.64% | 49.56% | 61.06% | 33.63% | 57.52% |
| *At Least One Mention* | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Female Candidate | 48.48% | 53.03% | 45.45% | 69.70% | 40.91% |
|  | Male Candidate | 36.17% | 46.81% | 29.79% | 61.70% | 44.68% |
|  | Total | 43.36% | 50.44% | 38.94% | 66.37% | 42.48% |

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| **Table 6. Frequency Distribution of Men’s Issue Category Mentions by Candidate Gender** | | | | | | |
|  | | “Men’s Issues” | Defense, Security, Military | Taxes and Spending | Economy | Foreign Affairs |
| *No Mentions* | |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female candidate | 60.61% | 60.61% | 51.52% | 28.79% | 54.55% |
| Male candidate | 59.57% | 46.81% | 51.06% | 31.91% | 65.96% |
| Total | 60.18% | 54.87% | 51.33% | 30.09% | 59.29% |
| *At Least One Mention* | |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female candidate | 39.39% | 39.39% | 48.48% | 71.21% | 45.45% |
| Male candidate | 40.43% | 53.19% | 48.94% | 68.09% | 34.04% |
|  | Total | 39.82% | 45.13% | 48.67% | 69.91% | 40.71% |

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| **Frequency Distribution of Candidate and Election Characteristics** | | |
|  | Frequency | Percent |
| Female candidate | 66 | 58.41 |
| Female opponent | 18 | 15.93 |
| Incumbent | 40 | 35.40 |
| Democrat | 57 | 50.44 |
| Competitiveness | 30 | 26.55 |
| Presidential Cycle | 42 | 37.17 |

Appendix B

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| **Table A1: Issue Categories and Keywords** | | | | |
| **“Women’s Issues”** | **“Men’s Issues”** | **Defense, Security, Military** | **Taxes and Spending** | **Race and Social Groups** |
| Advocacy for birth control/contraception, child care, Equal Rights Amendment, pay equity, pornography, women’s health care | Criminal justice system, death penalty, defense spending, Guantanamo Bay, hunting rights, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, nuclear weapons, Patriot Act, terrorism, war | Al Qaeda, defense, defense spending, GI Bill, national security, nuclear weapons, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Patriot Act, veterans’ affairs, war | Balanced budget, budget, debt, deficit, government size, government power, oil subsidies, spending, tax cuts | Advocacy for women, affirmative action, civil rights, Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, ERA/pay equity, gay rights, racial equality, discrimination |
| **Civil and Social Order**  Alcohol, bullying, civil liberties, criminal justice system, death penalty, domestic violence, hate crimes, hunting rights, illegal drugs, immigration, separation of church and state, social issues, stem cell research | **Social Welfare**  Birth control/ contraception, children’s issues/child care, education, energy, environment, health insurance, homelessness, prescription drugs, social security, social services, student loans, welfare, women’s health, women’s issues (not abortion, contraception) | **Economy**  Agriculture, automobile industry, economy, farms, federal employee wages, global currency, foreclosures, inequality (economic), jobs, minimum wage, outsourcing, personal finances | **Foreign Affairs**  Africa, China, diplomacy, foreign policy, human rights, international issues in health, Israel, Middle East, other specific country, spending on foreign aid, trade | **Government Functioning**  Campaign finance reform, constitutional amendments, decreasing partisanship in Congress, FDA, government transparency, insurance reform (not health care), PACs, personal scandal, reforms to congressional campaigns |

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| **Table A2. Specific Trait References Coded from Local News Coverage** | | | | |
|  | **Competence** | **Leadership** | **Integrity** | **Empathy** |
| **Positive** | Accomplished, assertive, careful, consistent, dedicated, determined, proactive, responsible | Active, ambitious, committed, confident, effective, independent, passionate, persistent, strong | Decent, ethical, honest, trustworthy | Caring, compassionate, concerned (with needs of constituents), empathetic, in touch, personable |
| **Negative** | Careless, clueless, ineffective, irresponsible, irresponsible, inexperienced, reactive, unprofessional | Argumentative, combative, fearful, not independent, party puppy, party lapdog | Dishonest, malicious, manipulative, not trustworthy, unethical | Not engaged, out of touch, not caring |

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| **Table A3. List of Candidates Included in the Sample by Gender** | |
| **Female** | **Male** |
| Natalie Tennant  Mazie Hirono  Jean Hay Bright  Barbara Ann Radnofsky  Shenna Bellows  Kay Hagan  Barbara Boxer  Dianne Feinstein  Kirsten Gillibrand  Lisa Johnston  Robin Carnahan  Michelle Nunn  Amanda Curtis  Cynthia Dill  Amy Klobuchar  Heidi Heitkamp  Tammy Baldwin  Vivian Davis Figures  Roxanne Conlin  Elaine Marshall  Shelley Berkley  Alison Lundergan Grimes  Joyce Dickerson  Claire McCaskill  Jeanne Shaheen  Elizabeth Warren  Blanche Lincoln  Mary Landrieu  Kay Hagan  Debbie Stabenow  Hillary Clinton  Maria Cantwell  Mary Landrieu  Barbara Mikulski  Kirsten Gillibrand  Patty Murray  Debbie Stabenow  Amy Klobuchar  Claire McCaskill  Maria Cantwell  Jeanne Shaheen  Dianne Feinstein  Shelly Moore Capito  Linda Lingle  Olympia Snowe  Kay Bailey Hutchison  Susan Collins  Elizabeth Dole  Carly Fiorina  Elizabeth Emken  Wendy Long | Richard Blumenthal  Paul Hodes  Bob Kerrey  Bruce Braley  Chris Coons  Chris Murphy  Martin Heinrich  Gary Peters  Scott McAdams  Tom Allen  Bill Nelson  Daniel Akaka  Joe Biden  Harry Reid  Jeff Merkley  Richard Blumenthal  Paul Hodes  Bob Kerrey  Bruce Braley  Chris Coons  Chris Murphy  Martin Heinrich  Gary Peters  Scott McAdams  Tom Allen  Bill Nelson  Daniel Akaka  Joe Biden  Harry Reid  Jeff Merkley |
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1. Media Library, Inc. did not have access to the data from Montana’s 2014 Senate race. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. U.S. Senator Angus King (I-ME) is considered a Democrat candidate for the purposes of the study as he caucused with the Democratic Party. Lisa Murkowski is included but not her opponents; Murkowski was a write-in candidate and the study was initially limited to primary election winners. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. While it is likely that mentions of candidates in stories includes ads, four individuals coded the data separately to eliminate advertisements. I believe that the nature of the coding produced a random sample of remaining ads (no one candidate’s ads were eliminated more than another), thereby justifying our methodology. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)