Republican Women and their struggle to overcome Gender Stereotypes

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**Abstract**

Voter’s ideologies and stereotypes have created barriers between voters and women candidates. The Republican Party portrays itself for fighting equality for all. The Republican Party also is known for its ideology that people should be judge for their achievements, beliefs and not for the sole reason of their gender. Although the number of Republican women elected into office has increase it is visible that the numbers of Republican women running for office diminish after the nineties. The misrepresentation of Republican women has been caused by the stereotypes voters are exposed to about women inability to best represent the nation. Between the year 1988 and today the number of Republican women in Congress has decreased by fifteen percent.

This research paper will discuss the factors that contribute to this decrease, a central focus on the stereotypes and the impacts on Republican women running for office. To gain a better understanding there will be a comparison between the Republican Party and the Democrat party. The efforts the Republican Party such as organizations focused on increasing the number of Republican women in Congress will also be studied to be able to see what contributes to this problem and the strategies to help overcome the stereotypes or play stereotypes in the favor of the Republican woman candidates as illustrated in Sarah Palin’s campaign. There are numerous approaches to this question such as finding a way to better integrate female candidates in the Republican National Committee and others argue that is best to encourage a female distinctiveness, and instead find ways to overcome the role of the media and their power to boost the stereotypes. This paper will conclude by stating the impact stereotypes have had on previous elections and what these stereotypes will mean for future women Republican candidates.

**Research Paper**

Throughout the history of the United States it has been visible that women have struggled to have their rights, and be considered as working individuals. As individuals who are able to contribute to the workplace as well as in academics, and politics. The suffrage movement, the women’s liberation movement and the increasing number of congresswomen shows how women are fighting for their rights and making equality possible in the United States. However, their fight against misrepresentation of women in Congress continues to exist. Voter’s ideologies and stereotypes have created barriers between voters and women candidates. This is specially seen in the case of Republican women candidates. Less and less republican women are being elected and this brings a crucial question-why? What are those barriers? What are those stereotypes? It is known that the reason many voters elect male candidates instead of female candidates because women are seen “softer” “weaker” than men.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, is there a difference between the stereotypes of Democratic women and Republican women? Certainly, but this research will mainly focus on the Republican women candidates and the stereotypes they constantly face and what has helped the Republican women already in Congress win. Although, there is not a massive amount of sources that shine light to the conflict of Republican women candidates and stereotypes there are scholars who have written about this and their interpretations and findings will be examined in order to gain a better perspective of the struggles Republican women candidates are exposed to when running for Congress.

There are several definitions of stereotype what they mean for candidates. The overall definition of stereotypes according to Kahn is a stereotype is a “cognitive structure that contains a set of expectations about a certain group or category.”[[2]](#footnote-2) She states that the “stereotypical views” of voters can contribute to their decision of choosing between a man or woman candidate.[[3]](#footnote-3)What contributes to this is the way the media and reporters address differently to male and female candidates. It has also been discovered that a candidate’s campaign and how they are perceived by the media such as in television advertisements and their websites can contribute to determining if serotypes will help or hurt women candidates. Another contributing factor is what the candidate is advocating for, what they are promising to fight for.

The book titled “ Unfinished Business: The 10 Most Important Issues Women Face Today” written in first person by Dr. Malveaux and Deborah Perry presents the ten main problems women are currently facing such as equal pay, education, reproductive rights and foreign policy and globalization.[[4]](#footnote-4) The book also mentions the reasons why the two authors identify themselves with the Republican Party. One of the reasons according to the authors is that the Republican Party stands for equality for everyone, and the idea that people should be judge for their achievements, ideologies and not for the sole reason of their gender. According to another scholar Burrell, “the Republicans encouraged change; the Democrats mandated equality.”[[5]](#footnote-5)They also mention the first woman elected to Congress in the year 1916. Representative Jeannette Rankin was a Republican who fought for the eight hour work day, suffrage amendment, prohibition, and an improved health care system for children and women.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Republican Party is mainly perceived as the party that favors economic and social policies that are less “re-distributive” than the policies favored by the Democratic Party. This illustrates the definition many individuals are aware of and most affiliate themselves when voting Republican however, it seems to present conflicts it suggest a different view on the Republican party as individuals avoid or prefer to vote for Republican male candidates instead of a female Republican candidate.

A crucial point regarding the lack of Republican women in Congress is that the stereotypes exists but how to fix it remains a mystery for many due to the reason that there is a lot to consider and assume such as the Republican party has been given credit with being open to women candidates, it is hard not to assume that the problem between feminism and the “cultural conservatism of the right wing” of the Republican Party leadership will increase in order to improve.[[7]](#footnote-7) However, this will be a challenge because of their limited ability to control nominations due to the primary election system. This can create a “clash” with the political agenda of the cultural conservatives and might cause fear to potential women candidates planning to run.[[8]](#footnote-8) The “emphasis” on the traditional family between the conservatives would trigger a dilemma with their promotion of women in political leadership positions.[[9]](#footnote-9) This perspective although it was difficult to understand offers a crucial point on the barriers, what prevents Republican Party to contribute more to the efforts of encouraging voters to elect Republican women candidates.

*Sex Stereotypes in the Political Arena*

Scholar’s efforts to explain the small number of women in “elective office” consist of examining the negative impact of sex stereotypes in political campaigns.[[10]](#footnote-10) However, scholars have “failed” to discover by studying election statistics and survey data that women receive less votes than male candidates.[[11]](#footnote-11) Experimental methods, survey studies are several ways scholars have attempted to use in order to gain a clear explanation of the negative impact of stereotypes in women’s political campaigns. However, this has not been easy and the most effective way has been directly asking voter who they would prefer to vote for a woman or man candidate which mainly all choose the male candidate. However, voters cannot give a clear reason why they would chose the male candidate instead of the female candidate. The book *Women for President: Media Bias in Eight Campaigns* adds to this by stating that agreeing that indeed stereotypical beliefs can affect the decision of whether or not supports a female candidate.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Almost all of the scholars being studied have mentioned briefly the Deloitte and Touché survey done in the year 2000. The survey shows that voters are more comfortable voting for a male candidate instead of a female candidate. Forty two percent believe that a man would do a better job and fourteen percent believe that a woman would be a better president.[[13]](#footnote-13) On the second most important voting consideration which was the economy thirty two percent would vote for a man candidate and twenty two percent would vote for a female candidate.[[14]](#footnote-14) However, when it comes to social issues like education, homelessness and poverty women candidates were more favored than men candidates.[[15]](#footnote-15) Also there have been studies that show that women tend to have “less traditional attitudes” than men which means that they are more willing to offer support to women in “non-stereotypical roles.”[[16]](#footnote-16) This last statement inspired a focus on finding the various reasons voters would vote for a women candidate. However, this lead to explanations focused solely on women and not Republican women. This contributes to the problem because so far the research has led to the general women aspect instead on the Republican women focus.

The idea that women are not being represented in Congress is clear especially as more information is provided on some of the struggles women face during their political campaigns. In a survey eleven percent of the people in the survey stated that it was not well perceived, it is not adequate that a women running for Congress be a mother. Only twenty percent disagree with this idea.[[17]](#footnote-17) This conflict was mainly one of the attacks against Sarah Palin. There were individuals who believed that she should not do both she would not be able to truly take care of both. However, there are people who believe that sacrifices must be done if they are serious in responding to the fact that “women are down about fifteen percent” of the Republican caucus.[[18]](#footnote-18) That meant that Republican women were at the same level as the Republican women in the year 1988.[[19]](#footnote-19) It is interesting that in the nineties it was the best time for female candidates this is mainly seen in the 1994 election in which seven of the eleven women elected were affiliated with the Republican Party.[[20]](#footnote-20)

In the book titled the “Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right” an explanation of the importance of the suffrage movement and with the Ronald Reagan’s 1980 election and the growing relationship between the Republicans and the Antifeminist New Right are emphasized to understand the start of the decreasing amount of Republican women representation. [[21]](#footnote-21) The question addressed is whether Republican women should encourage the female integration into male dominated environments such as the Republican National Committee or to encourage “female distinctiveness as seen in a female clubs and political organizations.[[22]](#footnote-22) It is stated that the main efforts Republican feminists are the Equal Rights Amendment and Subsidized day care.

The question whether the sex-based differences can be explained by whether the impact of political party is at work has been of a focus by many authors. What contribute to the clarification of the purpose of this question is that about sixty percent of women affiliated with the Republican Party won in the 2000 and 2002 election compared to the Democratic women candidates.[[23]](#footnote-23) Also the biggest differences between the two political parties regarding women candidates are: defense, agriculture, abortion. What this means is that when it comes to these problems voters are more likely to elect a Republican women candidate. This is for the reason that Republicans are more likely than Democrats to focus on defense, and Democrats are more likely than Republicans to focus on health care. However, this is a general statement and does not offer examples and solely focuses on the 2000 and 2002 election.[[24]](#footnote-24) Also according to Table 2 in her research, in the 2002 election, women who ran against men were slightly more likely to “highlight” abortion in their top five issues than were women who ran against other women.[[25]](#footnote-25) Although an explanation was not given it does provide a distinction between two scenarios a woman candidate running against a male candidate and a women candidate running against a women candidate. This creates different approaches by the candidate to different scenarios. As technology continues to evolve there are different way to attract votes the internet especially campaign websites have been use to promote a women candidate or to find ways to discourage voters to vote for a female candidate especially a Republican women candidate.

Adding to the idea that Republican women candidates face different barriers than Democratic female candidates, Betsy Reed the author of “Sex and the GOP” focuses on the impact of the media and Sarah Palin and the year 2010 which was the year of the right-wing woman. Also it encourages the statement that it was an advantage being a republican than a woman, combine it causes a complexity that must be solved. The question being asked is whether it is best for a Republican women candidate to portray herself as a feminist or in a more traditional “mainstream.”[[26]](#footnote-26) A different approach than the other Scholars studied, Reed believes that indeed it is important to study the Republican women who have won but also the ones who have lost and the reasons for their defeats.[[27]](#footnote-27) The article also focuses on the journey of Republican women candidates Lisa Murkowski and Jane Norton and how they had to deal with the lack of support from their own party when competing against their male competitors. This statement is the opposite of what was mention previously by a scholar who strongly believed in the equality of women and men. It is visible that is easier said than done. However, it agrees with other scholars with the idea that Republican women candidates represent people who want changes in the economy, education, healthcare, and environmental protection. [[28]](#footnote-28)

Several scholars have attempted to figure out whether the stereotypes and their effects are similar to all women candidates regardless of their political party affiliation. An attempt to figure out the distinction was attempted in the article titled “Do Gender Stereotypes Transcend Party? The authors endeavored to find explanations to why voters hold stereotypes about candidate gender and whether gender stereotypes transcend party. Especially whether gender stereotypes affect woman politicians differently by party and examine the effect of partisan identification on gender stereotypes. It is stated that indeed gender stereotypes are different for Democratic and Republican women. According to the authors, Women involved in politics are perceived as more liberal than men. [[29]](#footnote-29)

According to table five of the research, Democrats unlike Republicans are more likely to believe that women regardless of party affiliation are able to handle better education in Congress. This statement causes to question whether the Republican Party favors equality and truly believe that women can do the same job or even a better job than men. Also Republican women may be less likely to benefit from “issue competency stereotypes” among Republican voters than Democratic women do among Democratic voters. This article concludes that gender stereotypes have to some extent different consequences for the two political parties. Overall, Democratic women are more likely to have gender stereotypes that benefit women in politics. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to see an advantage for women regarding the issue of education and are likely than Republicans to see a men advantage on the issue of crime. [[30]](#footnote-30) Therefore, it does answer the question whether there is a difference between the stereotypes addressed to Republican women and Democratic women. The author’s well-written statements, tables and analysis enabled an understanding of the differences between the two political parties regarding women candidates.

Most articles more relevant in figuring out the constant stereotypes and their potential effects on the upcoming election are mainly about the 2012 election. A central focus on the 2012 election especially on the issues such as health care, abortion, and rape enable a better understanding of the stereotypes. However, according to the author women’s concerns are not solely abortion but also the economy and jobs.[[31]](#footnote-31) Also according to the author one of the reasons why the effort of eliminating the misrepresentation of women candidates is the constant decision of the Republican party of alienating women voters.

The author mentioned above also points out on a series of problems the Republican party has created that has had effect in society for example, they drafted a bill to redefine rape as “forcible” what contributed to the commotion was that it had 227 Republican cosponsors. The author believes that the Republican Party is not addressing women not even women of their own party which are in risk of losing their own women[[32]](#footnote-32) In the words of Laura Bush “Nations cannot survive without the full equality and participation of its women” and sadly the Republican party is doing the opposite loosing female supporters and discouraging women to run for office. This according to the author has caused the misinterpretation of Republican women in Congress. What is left to do is to end the decisions of controlling the women’s reproductive rights and disguising the government from personal decisions and increase the support and encourage women to become part of politics, join the Republican Party cause and believe that women representation is needed in Congress.

*Differences between the two political parties and stereotypes*

The repetitive stereotype covered by almost all of the scholars is that gender stereotypes are most likely to lead people to view male candidates as “aggressive” and “forceful” whereas women females are perceived as “kind” “sympathetic” and unable to be aggressive but different reasons are given by different scholars.[[33]](#footnote-33) Also another stereotype is that Republican women candidates tend to be more traditional and Democratic women tend to be more progressive. But does this mean that Democratic women can never be progressive, positive for social change. Also Republican women are less likely than Democratic women to be perceived favorably by their party members.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to believe that Women from their party would be better able to handle education.[[34]](#footnote-34) Also Republican women benefit from stereotypes because they are seen as less conservative that they are actually are therefore increasing support. However, Koch fails to include reasons why this has occurred.[[35]](#footnote-35) An explanation to this might be for Republican female candidates, gender stereotypes for ideology reduce the “distance between them and most voters” therefore increasing their electoral “prospects.”[[36]](#footnote-36) An example of this can be seen in the survey of seven hundred people it is visible that negative commercials are less effective at depressing evaluations of woman candidates compared to male candidates which intends to prove that the gender of the candidate influences people’s reactions to different types of negative commercials. Therefore the media does have an impact on how Republican women candidates are perceived and in determining whether a voter would give their vote.

This was mainly seen in the 2008 election when Hilary Clinton was running for President. She was constantly under pressure as the media solely focused on her physical appearance, her pant suit instead of what she had to say, had to offer. The pressures lead to her dropping out the race. This was similar to the case of Elizabeth Dole who was the first woman to make a “credible run” for the Republican presidential nomination. The nineties consisted with two first political wives. Hilary Clinton became the first wife of a president to ‘launch” an “independent bid” for national political office. Dole’s gender was emphasized in media portrayals of her candidacy creating challenger for voter to imagine her as president, was difficult to take her serious as a candidate due to the Medias strengthening the fact of her gender.[[37]](#footnote-37)

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the lack of Republican women in Congress it is crucial to focus on the issue of women candidates, their electability as well as what impact the partisan identity has on women’s electability. This is what author Susan Welch has focused her on. In her research she attempts to address the problem of shortage of women in the eligibility pool. When she began her research about twenty four percent of all members of state legislatures were lawyers, she predicted that if all legislatures were lawyers, women then would most like be only three percent of the legislature even if there are no other barriers.[[38]](#footnote-38) However, not all legislators are lawyers therefore this illustrates the complete discriminant model. This is a perfect example of how society tends to categorize, place people into categories despite acknowledging that one thing causes another. Women candidates are immediately categorize by voters as democrats and liberals without considering that there are women who categorize themselves with the Republican Party and not all women are liberals. As seen by other scholars studied in this research voters sometimes do this unconsciously but it is something that has to be address as people should be judge for their achievements, ideologies, personality, what they have to offer and not because of their gender. What the author also argues is that the research on whether women are more likely to win in multimember seats not employing proportional representation is inconclusive. This contributes to the gap between what is known about women candidates electability.

What enabled a better understanding of the research to answer many questions is that by using congressional districts as the taste case, the research mainly suggests that “districts that are strongly Democrat, small in geographic size, more urbanized, from the North rather than the South, include more minority and foreign-born populations, and include older, more educated, fewer blue-collar, and higher-income populations are more likely to support women.”[[39]](#footnote-39) This offers a clear picture of what women Republican candidates are confronting, they must be careful with what groups can they campaign to gain vote, however there is less groups where Republican women can gain support from.

It has been argued by the scholars mentioned above that the future it is crucial to look for stable predictors however, disappointment is a possibility. As society changes women chances of being in Congress changes. Early research suggested that women state legislators were more likely to be Republicans, however now most women legislators are Democrats. Therefore it is difficult to predict the future of Republican women. Also it depends on the type of election. Predictors of women’s becoming candidates are different than the predictors of their winning primaries and those predictors are different from predictors of women’s winning general elections.[[40]](#footnote-40) There is not exact way to say what will make a candidate more capable of winning in every election. To conclude, the author states that studying the recruitment and electoral success of women who are African American, Asian American and Hispanic will help gain a better understanding of Women and their electability.

Another author that examines the cause of inequality in representation in Congress examines various theories such as open-seat races. She begins by stating that “given that incumbency is a well-documented barrier to increased representation of an “out-group”, the number of open-seats races basically defines the opportunities to gain office.[[41]](#footnote-41) It is interesting that in the House of Representatives, there were forty open-seat House races in the year 1982 and forty seven in the year 1972 compared to the 1974 to 1980 time period of about 30.[[42]](#footnote-42) What this means is that when open seats are available there is a greater opportunity for women candidates to be elected to occupy those seats. There have also been situations when women politicians have be assigned to seats due to that party having an insufficient amount of women, which will address questions of inequality, misrepresentation. However, this does not completely answer how voters will vote for a women politician rather than a male politician.

An author that solely focuses on Republican women and through his research attempts to clarify some misconceptions that have existed for generations in order to fully grasp the importance of unbiased explanations of the difficulty women candidates encounter when running for Congress. According to the author, for numerous years “popular commentators” have suggested that the Republican party can decrease the gender gap by nominating women candidates. According to the author this “proposition” is assuming that some women voters ‘partisan identification may be successful by an “affinity” with their gender.[[43]](#footnote-43) Her observations due to her research have been that female candidates gain more support from their own gender, and in a “relationship not present with other male or female candidates, Democratic women candidates who face GOP men strongly benefit from Republican women voter’s crossover support.”[[44]](#footnote-44) This adds to what is known about the relationship of Women winning elections, it also contributes to how much more gender stereotypes have a bigger impact on men than women.

According to the author, it is clear that the success of a gender-based electoral strategy for any office depends on the strength of women voter’s support for candidates.[[45]](#footnote-45) Based on the sources used by the author as evidence female Republican voters are more likely to “cross party lines to cast ballots for Democratic some candidates.”[[46]](#footnote-46) This theory, findings have been tested by using national surveys from the most recent U.S. elections. What this source suggests is that women tend to vote for a women candidate most likely a Democrat but they will choose any women candidate instead of a male candidate. However, this idea has been argued as many as not being represented, as it is not possible to completely know that all women will vote for a women candidate just because of their gender, it is assuming too much.

The book *More Women Can Run: Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures* adds to this view by analyzing numerous interviews of both Democrat and Republican women who share their experiences as the minority in Congress. One Republican legislator mentioned how she received smaller contributions to her campaign than her male opponent who both were capable and eligible to get appointed for a state senate position. She strongly believes that the only reason she did not get as much financial support as the male candidate was because of her gender.[[47]](#footnote-47) She suggested that it might be that donors as voters might believe that due to her gender it would not have been adequate for her to be an elected to higher office. Like her many stories reflect the frustration of constantly competing with their gender, the inability of many people not looking female candidates as suitable legislators.

Other legislators believed also that one prevents voters from voting for a women candidate is that they do not believe that they would be able to be professional when they have to both have a marriage and have kids. They believe that women should not run for office as they would not fully commit to their elected office. However, legislators argued that they are completely capable of doing both and that there are some candidates without husbands or children therefore that should not be an excuse. Other frustrations are the idea that women politicians are too emotional, that they will not be able to handle their obligations without avoiding their emotions. This according to the author is exactly what former first lady Hilary Clinton was exposed to and what women politicians want to help to decrease the fear of running for office due to the attacks of society for being too emotional, a bad mom or not educated enough to be part of Congress.

Eighty three percent of Republican women sponsored women’s issue bill in the 103rd Congress compared to thirty seven percent of men.[[48]](#footnote-48) Yet in the 104 Congress it is illustrated that the support of Republican women decreased to fifty nine percent. This dropped is mostly explained by the election of six conservative Republican women they did not supported any of the women’s issue bills such as social welfare and feminism or even antifeminist. Only one of the ten Republican women who served both 103rd and 104th Congress decreased her support to about zero percent.[[49]](#footnote-49) The nine women supported the same amount of bills as in the previous Congress or supported more of the bills than in the previous Congress session. What this contributed to is to the idea that increasing the number of women in Congress might have a more negative impact than positive as many opponents to increasing the number of women argue that it would instead hurt the chances of bills beneficial to women to be passed as the first year candidates tend to show that they can be strong and not support all bills.

This book also like the previous article is highly concerned with the future of Women in Congress. It suggests the encouragement of public officials, people should encourage women to run for office and to increase the number of women candidates it is essential to have more organizations that support women, and train, prepare women to run for Congress and help them raise money for their campaigns. It is also stated that Republican women have less organizational infrastructure in which they can rely on which is one of the contributors to the misrepresentation of women in Congress. Also, the “addition of more women to Republican party leadership ranks would seem to offer one of the most promising avenues for increasing the party’s commitment to recruiting and supporting more women to run for the state legislature in the years ahead.”[[50]](#footnote-50) This states that by Republican women increasing their numbers they will contribute to the whole effort of having women in general regardless of party affiliation in office. This according to the author must be the first thing on the agenda in the effort to end misrepresentation of women in Congress, and overall Politics.

*Conclusion*

The scholars being studied have stressed the importance of the history of the Republican party in order to gain a whole picture of the problem in hand, to start with how it started help acquire a clearer understanding of first what was the purpose of welcoming women into the party and the various women committees. Did it achieve what it was intended and how can it continue to carry its mission even today. The study of the suffrage movement enables a better understanding of the founding mothers of the idea that women should be part of politics such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton.[[51]](#footnote-51) The scholars have also stressed the importance of understanding the complexity, and different ways of analyzing and approaching, and understanding the gender gap in voting; the gender gap in relation to partisanship; as well as “motherhood, ethnicity, and the impact of parental status on the gender gap; and the gender gap in races involving female candidates.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

The social eligibility pool, legislative professionalism, and partisan composition of the legislature affect women's representation differently by each political party. Instead of assuming a single way for women to win in an election, explanations of the challenges women face offer a deeper understanding of the misreperantation of women in Congress. It is a complex topic as there are not a lot of studies or scholars however, it provides a clarification of what society, the political parties can do to have a more represented, an equal Congress and overall and equal United Sates.

It has been a concern for generations and for many it has been a challenge to increase the number of women elected officials especially women candidates. It has been agreed upon that by not having an adequate amount of women in Congress, a vast majority of individuals, ideologies are not being represented. Therefore, according to the scholars being studied in this research paper have agreed on the importance of finding an explanation to the stereotypes, the theories that have triggered voters to vote for a male politician instead of a women politician.

By understanding for the reasons why Republican women are not being elected and why the ones who have been elected have been elected will help figure out how to help to diminish voters’ decisions to not vote for women politicians solely due to their gender. The future according to the scholars for Republican women is bright. The scholars studied for this research paper argued that although there are not sufficient sources regarding the impact of stereotypes it is quite clear that they do exist and that they will continue to play a role in the defeats of the congressional elections of female Republican women. Therefore, it is crucial to diminish the negative perceptions often existing in election such as that women are weak or that they are not able to balance domestic life and Congressional life.

As mentioned by Congresswoman Ileana- Ross it might be difficult to believe that women can do it all but it is a known fact that it is possible and that many have succeeded and the a women will do anything to best represent their nation if not they would not run. The constant disagreement visible in Congress as illustrated by the government shutdown, the inability to cooperate due to their strong party affiliation beliefs have caused distance and ineffectiveness and women should be given the opportunity as a free country to have the opportunity to run for office and have a just race therefore the control of the media should be addressed in order to help change the perceptions of Republican women. In order for people to be able to vote based on individuals and not based on gender it must be set by example, address the problem to diminish inequality in the nation.

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