

**Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless.** *Women on the Run: Gender, Media, and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 185pp. (\$99.99 hardcover, \$24.99 paper).

Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless set a surmountable task before themselves in *Women on the Run: Gender, Media, and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era*. Challenging years of conventional wisdom and decades of research that point to the contrary, Hayes and Lawless question the widespread belief that women face substantial bias when running for political office in the United States. Across six chapters the authors present evidence to the contrary, demonstrating that women do not encounter systematic differences in campaign rhetoric, media coverage and content, and voter impressions when compared to their male counterparts. To find this support the methods are varied and extensive; spanning both traditional newspapers and Twitter posts for content analysis, implementing two national level surveys, and conducting multiple qualitative interviews of professionals in the field. Consistently, the results demonstrate that systematic bias for women appears to be limited at best. In the final chapter, Hayes and Lawless explore why substantial portions of the public continue to believe that women receive sexist media coverage, face bias from voters, and have a harder time than men in getting elected.

The book positions itself as the most comprehensive assessment of women's experiences in political campaigns in recent history. The recent (1990's and early 2000s) research tends to focus on some combination of three aspects: candidate communication, media coverage, or voter impressions – Hayes and Lawless extend this conversation by addressing all three in concert. Chapter 1 addresses the layout of the book and discusses representation and bias in politics for women. The authors clarify that the political process is not gender neutral – rather, they admit that there is likely systematic bias in recruitment, sexism on the campaign trail, and that they only focus on US elections for the House. However, their text is concerned that a misperception about the prevalence of bias actually serves as a barrier for entry. While this is a strong and convincing argument, as it is important to identify both what does and what does not bias against women, this is not something that is actually tested in the book.

Chapters 2-5 set out to address the three major aspects of the campaign process and to identify if any systematic bias exists between genders. Chapter 2 begins with an introduction to past literature, current conventional wisdom, and an overview of the empirics used throughout the book. The opening focuses on the “almost masochistic experience” of running for office while female in the 1970s. However, the authors quickly depart from this and make clear that this type of scenario is not common for women in contemporary politics. Instead, they contend that the most salient part of an election, even when a woman is on the ballot, is the partisan divide. Hayes and Lawless utilize varied data depending upon which aspect of the political process they are focusing on. Both TV advertisements and Twitter feeds are coded for content for the analysis of campaign communications. When addressing media coverage they rely upon local newspapers, manually encoding thousands of articles for references of sex or gender, ascribed traits, and associated issues. Finally, when addressing voter impressions, they implement two national surveys to observe if candidate gender bore any significant influence on respondent

impressions. In addition to this the authors also conducted multiple interviews with experts in the field.

Chapter 3 explores the campaign messages in both the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections – utilizing TV ads and Twitter feeds respectively. The chapter was broken into four parts: (1) testing the hypothesis that sex plays little role in shaping candidate communication, (2) assessing why this is the case, (3) questioning if campaigns focusing on women’s issues involve more women, and (4) interpreting interviews regarding the relevance of gender in campaign communications. Through multiple tests they largely found that issue agendas and campaign content do not appear to be related to sex of the candidate or their opponent. The varied approaches are laudable. However, it would have been preferable to code both sources for each year as the observation of statistically significant differences for women appear to be contingent on year/data source. This might indicate that women have different experiences depending on campaign marketing strategies. The more consistent story here comes from the party, with differences in campaign messages being largely tied to party ID. The chapter is a very convincing portrayal of a partisan dominated campaign process.

Chapter 4 focuses on the role of the media by addressing three potential gendered communications: (1) discussion of candidates in terms of gendered roles, (2) trait assignments, and (3) associated issues. The authors perform extensive content analysis and have made a great effort in identifying mentions of gender or language that draws attention to sex. Additionally, they code over 200 masculine and feminine traits and issues mentioned. The chapter lives up to its title: “Sex is no story”, as time and again we must accept the null hypothesis of no significant differences between gender across gender mentions, traits, and issue associations. Instead, a compelling story is delivered that newsworthiness (such as the existence of an incumbent or a highly competitive race) drives the media coverage and content, rather than sex of candidate.

Finally, Chapter 5 addresses the component of voter impressions utilizing both 2010 and 2014 CCES survey results. First, open ended prompts regarding impressions of candidates are explored followed by associated traits and issue competency questions. For nearly all results no statistically significant differences between male and female candidates are observed. Once again partisanship is demonstrated to be the dominant force, the polarization seeming to drive any differences that we observe between reported impressions. Substantively, of the twenty models run across the ten issue categories, party was significant in all and gender was only significant in two (and in both the women were advantaged as reportedly being statistically more competent than their male counterparts). Perhaps the most compelling evidence that gender is still at play in today’s elections is presented at the end of this chapter when encoding issue and trait competencies when matching the gender of the respondent to the candidate. Here, for the first time in the book we observe significant findings; showing that GOP women rate female candidates lower on issues of the economy, and in 2014 Democrat women rate women higher on competence, empathy, and trustworthiness.

Chapter 6 provides a very strong conclusion, summarizing the limited number of times in which significant differences were observed in line with gender stereotypes (accounting for only 4.2% of all the models run). Hayes and Lawless discuss three possibilities for why these misperceptions of bias persist despite the lack of evidence to support it: (1) social identity and

perception, (2) the national discussion of gender, and (3) workplace/personal experiences extrapolated to the political context. The authors conclude with a call to arms — to spread the message that women do not face systematic bias in these three arenas of the campaign and to ensure that perceptions of the electoral environment no longer hinder the confidence of potential female entrants or their recruitment.

Overall, this work takes a great step forward in departing from the dated conventional wisdom regarding women’s experiences in political campaigns. The quality and comprehensive nature of the analysis and broad applicability of its findings make for a compelling read.

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