

## Speaking about Women in the Year of Hillary Clinton

### **Abstract**

Previous research has explored the extent to which elected officials follow the lead of individuals in leadership positions. In this study, I will discuss whether or not women in leadership positions inspire elected officials to discuss important issues related to gender equality. I hypothesize that if Hillary Clinton is present on the ballot there will be an increase in representatives, specifically female representatives, likelihood of speaking out on women's issues. I expect my hypothesis to be true because representatives follow party leaders and trends in the media. To test my hypothesis, I will use data from over 60,000 press releases between the years of 2013-2016 and computer aided content analysis to address this question. The results demonstrate that Clinton's presence on the ballot did increase Democrats and Women's likelihood of speaking out for women's issues.

### **Introduction**

Without women in leadership positions, levels of discussion of issues related to gender equality including addressing pay inequality, recognizing the achievements of women and finding ways to solve women being underrepresented in positions of power decrease. Therefore, women discussing women's issues is important because it can help address the inequality of women by uniting women together to push for equality. My study is unique because it focuses on a new context; it focuses on the only time in the United States where a woman has competed for presidency. Further, my study focuses on if this factor will cause female representatives, rather than male representatives, to speak out on women's issues. The best way to test my hypothesis is to explore whether U.S. House Representatives paid more attention to issues related to gender equality in the year in which Clinton was the Democratic Party's nominee for president. Moreover, I explore which U.S. House Representatives were more influenced by her presence on the ballot; female representatives or male representatives. I use data from over 60,000 press releases between the years of 2013-2016 and computer aided content analysis to address this question. Ultimately, I find that if Clinton is present on the ballot, then there is an increase in representatives, specifically female representative's, likelihood of speaking out on women's issues.

### **Literature Review**

Representatives are constantly concerned and focused on their re-election. Therefore, representatives are selective in the issues that they discuss because they want to increase, rather than decrease, their levels of popularity. An increase in popularity will then cause an increase in what representative's care about most; their chances at being re-elected into office. As a result of representatives being election-minded, representatives will be careful not to discuss issues that would potentially decrease their popularity, further harm their chances at being re-elected (Stout, Martin, & Abouzeid, 2015). Being constantly concerned with re-election causes representatives

to follow trends in the media. Representatives discuss issues that are also being discussed in the media.

Representatives follow media trends because it allows representatives to “play it safe” by discussing popular, trending issues (Cook, 2010). Therefore, the representatives are not risking re-election by speaking out on issues that are not trending in the media (i.e., issues that are not popular). Further evidence to suggest that representatives follow trends in media is evident with the 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama. Because Obama’s presidential election was a historic first (him becoming the first African American president), there was an increase in media focus on Obama (Simien, 2016). This increase in focus in turn increased his overall media attention, allowing him to trend in the media. Subsequently, this caused representatives to follow Obama because representatives follow trends in media.

When Presidents have high levels of public approval, representatives tend to follow the agenda set out by party leaders. Representatives want to keep their jobs by continuing to be re-elected and therefore will listen to “messages” from citizens through their votes in elections (Beckmann, 2010). After Presidents are elected they enter a honeymoon phase which provides them with high support from the public, the media and members of Congress. The executive’s ability to push their agenda is motivated by favorable news coverage and poll numbers. (Grossman and Kumar, 1981). A president enhances the public salience of an issue by advocating for it to the electorate. The amount of media coverage and popularity an issue receives induces legislative responsiveness. If the president makes an appeal in which the voters preferred outcome is in this direction, then Congress will shift their position on the issue to align with the executive. Therefore, representatives tend to follow party leaders and support the agenda of party leaders.

After the crisis of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the country experienced what is known as the rally around the flag effect where public approval and popularity increased for the then president, George Bush (Schubert, Stewart, & Curran, 2002). This increase in the president’s popularity caused representatives to follow the lead and agenda of the president because for representatives, following the lead and agenda of a popular president increases their chances of popularity, and therefore increases their chances at re-election. Therefore, an increase in a president’s popularity will cause representatives to increase their support for the president’s agenda.

Overall, when deciding what issue to discuss or speak out on and what issues not to discuss or speak out on, representatives follow trends in the media and their party leaders. This is powerful evidence to suggest that representatives during the 2016 presidential election would follow Hillary Clinton’s lead on what issues to discuss because Clinton was a party leader and trending in the media. The media focused specifically on Clinton’s gender because she is the first woman to be on the presidential election ballot

Further, Clinton’s presence on the 2016 presidential election ballot was a historic first; she was the first woman to run for president of the United States. This historic first caused the media to focus on Clinton’s gender specifically because females, being a marginalized group, now had someone of their gender running for president. This caused Clinton to trend in the media, which further caused representatives to speak out on and discuss issues that Clinton was speaking out on and discussing. (because they felt empowered by a woman being on the ballot and historic first context allowed them to feel like there was more space to speak out (Simien, 2016).

Furthermore, representatives would follow party leaders because it is what the electorate has established they want. Party leaders have the ability to make appeals to the public and due to the increased salience surrounding the issue, Congress is more likely to align their position to match the executives.

I expect female representatives to be unique in following Clinton because marginalized groups, such as females, have higher levels of group consciousness due to the fact that when individuals are marginalized, they think about their identity more. Therefore, female representatives will feel a strong sense of group consciousness; meaning, they will feel a personal and internalized (female) group identity (with females) and this group identity will cause female representatives to have increased political awareness of female's position in society (Stout, Kretschmer, & Ruppner, 2017).

Therefore, because representatives follow trends in the media and their party leaders, Hillary Clinton speaking out and discussing issues related to gender equality during the 2016 presidential election will cause representatives to speak out and discuss issues related to gender equality.

## **Data**

To test my hypothesis, my classmates and I coded 9,000 out of 60,000 press releases from the 114<sup>th</sup> United States Congress, searching for press releases regarding gender equality. The press releases were coded as a “one” when the press release contained information regarding gender equality and coded as a “zero” when the press release did not contain information regarding gender equality. Press releases were considered to contain information regarding gender equality if the press release mentioned anything regarding women's rights, recognizing the achievements of women leaders, recognizing females in education, violence against women, support for abortion rights, support for planned parenthood, discussion of the well-being of women, pay equality, gender inequality, women in combat, women's history month, sex trafficking and/or women in STEM.

For example, the follow press release was coded as a “one” for its mention of gender pay equity and fighting for working families, specifically women: “...Congresswomen Debbie Dingell (MI-12) joined with Michigan legislators today to discuss their collective efforts to fight for women and working families in Michigan. These polices include initiatives at the state and federal level to pass paid sick day legislation, establish gender pay equity laws and curb the skyrocketing costs of child care...” The following press release by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee was also coded as a “one” for its recognition of females in education: “...regarding the White House announcement of \$70 million grant program for girl's education programs in Pakistan and First Lady Michelle Obama's ‘Let Girls Learn’ initiative: ...the education and empowerment of girls is an issue near and dear to me.”

The remaining 51,000 press releases were coded via a computer assisted programming system. This computer program compared the words in the press releases that had already been coded “one” to the words in the press releases that had already been coded “zero.” The computer program generated common words found in press releases containing information on gender equality and common words found in press releases *not* containing information on gender equality. Then, the computer program searched for combinations of words found in press releases coded for gender equality, such as pay equality, wage gap and women. If a press release

was found to have combinations of gender equality words, then it was coded as a “one.” The computer program also looked for combinations of words *not* commonly found in press releases coded for gender equality, such as banking, holiday and guns. If a press release was found to have combinations of non-gender equality words, then it was coded as a “zero.”

In order to find out whether female or male representatives speak out more on issues related to gender equality, the mean score of gender appealing press releases is taken for each representative. For example, if one representative had 1,000 press releases during the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress and 100 of them were scored for gender appeal, then that representative's score is .10 in their levels of discussion of issues related to gender equality. I expect that female representatives, rather than male representatives, will speak out more on issues related to gender equality.

When comparing whether male or female representatives speak out more on issues related to gender equality, one must control for factors that could be contributing to the level of discussion of issues related to gender equality. Therefore, when testing my hypothesis, I control for age, race and party affiliation. I control for age, race and party affiliation because these factors can determine their levels of discussion of issues related to gender equality. I predict that young individuals, compared to old, will be more likely to speak out on women's issues because younger individuals are more concerned with minority representation (Dalton, 2016). I expect racial/ethnic minorities, compared to whites, will be more likely to speak out on women's issues because they themselves being a minority will identify with other minorities, in this case, females. I predict that members of the Democratic Party will be more likely to speak out on women's issues because the left wing is more supportive of minorities.

## **Methods**

To test my hypothesis that female representatives spoke out on issues related to gender equality more than male representatives in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, I ran a T-Test and Regression analysis. The appropriate bi-variate test for my independent variable, female representatives, is a T-Test because I'm comparing whether women or men were more likely to speak out on issues related to gender equality in 2015 and 2016. I ran a regression because there are multiple factors I want to control for and running a multivariate regression will allow me to control for the factors I wish to control for.

## **Results**

The T-Test shows that female representatives speak out on issues related to gender equality 4.0%, while men speak out on issues related to gender equality 0.07%. These figures show that female representatives are 3.3% more likely than male representatives to discuss issues related to gender equality during 2016, the year Hillary Clinton was on the presidential candidate ballot. The T-Test also shows that my findings are significant because the P-value is 0.00%, which is less than 0.05%. Therefore, my hypothesis that female representatives will speak out more than male representatives in 2016 is supported.

Because I want to see if my hypothesis will still hold true with my controls, I turn to regression. Running a regression will show if there is a relationship between the average numbers of gender appeals, which is predicted by the gender of the representative. The results of the regression show that being a female representative increases the levels of discussion of issues

related to gender equality by 2.9%, as compared to male representatives that increase by 0.9%. These findings are significant above and beyond my controls.

Out of the three factors I controlled for (age, race and party affiliation), only one factor was significant; party affiliation. The regression test showed that the P-value for party affiliation is 0.002%, which is less than 0.05%. This shows that party affiliation is significant when asking why female representatives speak out more about issues related to gender equality than male representatives. The findings from the regression indicate that the Democratic party spoke out more on issues related to gender equality by 0.7%.

Therefore, it seems that being a Democratic, rather than a Republican, also increases a representative's level of discussion of issues related to gender equality. I would argue that there is a significant relationship because women's issues are seen as more liberal, therefore, women's issues are seen as an issue for Democratic representatives to discuss.

## **Conclusion**

I hypothesized that female representatives will speak out more than male representatives on issues related to gender equality in 2015 and 2016 because of Hillary Clinton's presence on the presidential candidate ballot. My findings from 60,000 press releases from the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress supported my hypothesis and showed that Hillary Clinton's presence on the presidential candidate ballot did increase representative's levels of discussion of issues related to gender equality; with a greater increase of levels of discussion in female, rather than male, representatives. This means that Hillary Clinton's presence on the presidential candidate ballot increased the levels of discussion of issues related to gender equality. Overall, this suggests that a female candidate and/or president would cause an increase in representative's levels of discussion of issues related to gender equality; particularly in female representatives.

These findings are relevant for the representation of women in government as a whole because it can be suggested that the representation of women in government can be drastically improved and expanded with a female president. Further, it can be suggested that a female president would not only increase levels of discussion regarding women's issues, but ultimately get those issues addressed and resolved. On the other hand, without females in positions of political leadership (the introduction of female presidents), it can be suggested that women's issues will not (ultimately) get addressed and resolved.

Given more time and resources, I would improve my project by self-coding more press releases than 9,000; perhaps code for 30,000 press releases and let the computer assisted program generate the rest. This would perhaps help the computer program be more specific in the combination of words that predict the code of the press release. To further improve my project, I would look into other times women leaders appeared on voting ballots and research if levels of discussion of issues related to gender equality also increased during the woman leader's presence on the ballot.

## Tables

### T-Test

Two-sample t test with equal variances

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
0	301	.007305	.0009639	.0167235	.0054081	.0092019
1	69	.0403909	.0042838	.0355843	.0318426	.0489392
combined	370	.0134751	.001302	.0250449	.0109148	.0160354
diff		-.0330859	.0028688		-.0387272	-.0274446

diff = mean(0) - mean(1) t = -11.5329  
 Ho: diff = 0 degrees of freedom = 368

Ha: diff < 0 Ha: diff != 0 Ha: diff > 0  
 Pr(T < t) = 0.0000 Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.0000 Pr(T > t) = 1.0000

### Regression

. regress genderappeal2016 femalerep repage blackrep democratrep

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	367
Model	.06595783	4	.016489458	F(4, 362)	=	36.65
Residual	.16285531	362	.000449877	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.2883
				Adj R-squared	=	0.2804
Total	.22881314	366	.000625173	Root MSE	=	.02121

gendera~2016	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
femalerep	.0297909	.0030264	9.84	0.000	.0238392	.0357425
repage	-.0000924	.0001058	-0.87	0.383	-.0003003	.0001156
blackrep	.0036998	.004253	0.87	0.385	-.004664	.0120636
democratrep	.0077059	.0024586	3.13	0.002	.002871	.0125407
_cons	.0094649	.0061398	1.54	0.124	-.0026092	.021539

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