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The prominence and acceptance of gender as an important subject of inquiry in U.S. politics has been steadily growing in political science. Indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, small sample sizes of women in politics and disdain from the disciplinary gatekeepers made the serious study of gender in U.S. politics difficult to pursue (Flammang 1997; Tolleson-Rinehart and Carroll 2006). The world is clearly different today, as gender politics courses are finding their way into undergraduate and graduate curricula throughout the United States. While the ascension of gender analysis of U.S. politics as a critical variable for study is not complete, the future is bright. Several recent volumes have addressed the current state of the subfield, and most notably, Susan J. Carroll's (2003) edited volume *Women and American Politics: New Questions, New Directions* focused on the very purpose of laying out a research agenda for those studying gender in U.S. politics (see also Krook and Childs 2010; Wolbrecht, Beckwith, and Baldez 2008). In this essay, I continue the discussion of where the gender and U.S. politics subfield is headed by providing a brief overview of the state of the field and by offering suggestions for future avenues of study, primarily in the area of candidate emergence.

The Study of Gender in U.S. Politics

Studies of gender politics in the United States almost always have at their foundation concerns about political representation. Women remain drastically underrepresented in U.S. politics, with almost 90 nations ranking ahead of the United States in terms of the number of women in the national legislature. The 2010 midterm elections represent the first election since the late 1970s in which the total number of women representatives in the U.S. Congress actually declined. It has become almost a cliché that any article focusing on women in U.S. politics will begin with a recitation of the woeful numeric representation of women in high-level office. But concerns about the representation of women in U.S. politics remain salient today as the road to gender equity in numeric representation continues to be slow and uncertain.

In terms of charting women's pursuit of electoral office, the research has moved through several different phases. In the first wave of research through the 1970s, the evidence found an environment that was openly hostile to the few women who actually ventured into the electoral system. But the evidence was often derived from small samples based on anecdotal evidence (e.g., Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994). The mid-1980s brought forward some of the first broad quantitative work (e.g., Carroll 1985; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1987), which painted a picture of women's exclusion from politics but did not confirm the substantial levels of gender bias that much of the earlier work had posited. As more and more women entered electoral office during the 1990s, empirical evidence began to show little or no bias in general election outcomes (e.g., Burrell 1994; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997). Some gender and politics scholars began to question the utility of studying an electoral process that empirical evidence tended to characterize as gender neutral. But the next wave of studies provided a more holistic view of women's entrance and participation in electoral politics. Scholars have found that when the candidate emergence process is examined broadly, gender continues to play a significant role in terms of the formation of political ambition (Lawless and Fox 2005; 2010) and recruitment to run for office (Sanbonmatsu 2006). And when investigators take a more in-depth and nuanced look at voting, media coverage, campaigning, and fund-raising, they often find that women and men face different challenges (e.g., Falk 2008; Lawless and Pearson 2008).

Beyond chronicling the electoral fortunes of women candidates, researchers focusing on substantive representation have examined the myriad ways that women and men political leaders might perform the duties of governing differently. Most notably, researchers have examined and compared the voting records and policy priorities of women and men officeholders to determine whether there are significant substantive differences. For example, analyses of bill sponsorship and floor remarks in the U.S. Congress find that women are more likely than men to focus on "women's issues," such as gender equity, day care, flex time, abortion, minimum wage increases, and the extension of the food stamp program (Burrell 1994; Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Swers 2002). Similar policy differences among women and men state legislators have also been uncovered (Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Bratton 2005; Thomas 1994). Some of the more recent research, though, finds that gender differences in legislator policy priorities have dissipated (Frederick 2009; Schwindt-Bayer and Corbetto 2004).

Other researchers examining gender differences and substantive representation have focused on leadership styles both in elective and appointed positions. A wide array of additional studies have looked at legislative committee chairs, city managers, and local elected officials to find important stylistic differences in the performance of leadership positions between women and men (see Fox and Schuhmann 1999; Rosenthal 1998; Weikart et al. 2007).

Ultimately, researchers have made substantial strides in explaining the role of gender in U.S. politics. In terms of electoral politics, it has become clear that there is no widespread gender bias in general election outcomes, but that gender continues to exert significant influence on the way that women come to enter the political arena. As far as investigations of substantive representation go, researchers are still uncovering significant differences concerning how women and men prioritize policies and provide political leadership.

The Future Study of Gender and U.S. Elections

Given all that we now know about women and U.S. politics, what are the critical questions that remain? At least five areas of future research merit investigation. A first critical area involves the intersection between gender and *perceptions*. The importance of gender differences in politically relevant perceptions has long been posited by scholars in the subfield. But the empirical research demonstrating the importance of perceptions is not as well developed. Timothy Bledsoe and Mary Herring (1990) suggested in an early study of political ambition that the gender differences concerning how potential candidates answer survey questions and ultimately view the electoral playing field might drive a great deal of political behavior. Jennifer L. Lawless and I suggest that gender differences in perceptions — perceptions often at odds with the political and personal realities — may play a significant role in influencing the behavior of prospective candidates. Perceptual differences between women and men might be an important vehicle through which to examine a wide range of political actors.

A second area in need of future research is the role of gender in *local electoral politics*. While several centers and organizations track the numbers of women running and winning at the state and federal levels, no one chronicles the gender breakdown of women running for or holding local offices. We simply do not have sustained, reliable information about the number of women serving on school boards and

city councils, or how these numbers have changed over time. Since career ladder politics remains an essential aspect of understanding women's path to gender equality, limited information on the numbers of women running for local office and the little systematic evidence regarding the processes by which women come to run at the local level create an area in need of examination.

The third area of inquiry pertains to *gender socialization*. In this regard, early political socialization is particularly important. Several studies of college students suggest that substantial differences in political ambition to run for elective office are already present in college-age citizens (see Lawless and Fox 2010, 169). For most people, choosing to run for office is not a spontaneous decision; rather, it is the culmination of a long, personal evolution that often stretches back into early family life. Relatedly, traditional gender role orientations are also of central concern in understanding women's participation in electoral politics. Analysis by feminist theorists and gender politics scholars has long argued that the perpetuation of gender roles, whereby women are primarily responsible for household and child-care duties, are a central source of women's slow move into positions of political power (e.g., Enloe 2004; Freedman 2002). But no recent empirical work investigates how or whether traditional gender socialization continues to serve as an impediment to women's participation in politics.

Fourth, the intersection between gender and *political conservatism* must be investigated. Since the early 1980s, women have gained a steady share of the percentage of Democratic officeholders. The same has not been true among Republicans. In fact, after the 2010 elections, women represent roughly a quarter of the Democratic congressional delegation, but less than 10% of the Republican caucus. This is the largest disparity in women's officeholding between the parties in U.S. history. Simply put, women have maintained a steady path toward gender parity in U.S. politics, but only in one party. At this point, explaining these differences remains largely in the realm of speculation.

Fifth, researchers must examine the significance of the dramatic changes in *role model politics* of the last five years. While the underlying numbers of women serving in office show little or modest change, there is no question that there have been substantial changes in the presence of women in high-level politics. Nancy Pelosi served as the first woman Speaker of the House from 2007 to 2010. Hillary Clinton was the first woman to be a serious contender for her party's presidential nomination in 2008; and the protracted nature of her battle for the nomination with Barack Obama

kept her in the headlines for months. Sarah Palin become only the second woman selected as a vice-presidential candidate and is now one of the most familiar political figures in the country. U.S. society is experiencing the first generation of girls and boys and young women and men who will grow up with women political leaders holding and competing for some of the very top-level positions of political power in the United States. Many questions persist about how and whether this transformation of U.S. politics will have lasting and important effects on political attitudes.

In addition to these areas, the constant changes in the role and presence of women in U.S. politics necessitate that researchers continue to track the progress of women who enter the electoral arena. Ultimately, though, the future research agenda needs to be driven by some of the broader questions about how U.S. society continues to evolve, particularly with regard to gender socialization and the resulting impressions it leaves on women and men who are positioned to enter the electoral arena.

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Gendering Comparative Politics: Achievements and Challenges

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Approximately one-fifth, or 21%, of the members of the American Political Science Association identify themselves as comparativists, according to data in 2004. Among those affiliated with the APSA Women and Politics Research Section, the corresponding figure is nearly one-third, or 31% (Tripp 2010, 192). While not a majority, these patterns suggest that