

Parity Perspective

Recruiting, Training and Funding: How Political and Women's Organizations Help Women Candidates

In the last decade, political groups and political action committees (PACs) focused on ensuring that more women are elected have become major players in American politics. While their missions and core constituencies may vary, with some organizations focusing on women candidates who support a particular issue, who belong to a particular political party, or who come from a particular region, collectively, these organizations do the same general work: they recruit, train, and/or fund women candidates, and their work is essential to leveling the playing field for women.

The Role of Political and Women's Groups in Recruiting Women Candidates

While the most common sources of encouragement to run for office for both men and women are officeholders and political party officials, political and women's organizations also play an important role in increasing gender parity in elected office. For one, women legislators, more so than male legislators, report that political and women's organizations play a large role in their decisions to run. In 2008, a survey of state representatives by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University found that 12% of female state representatives reported an



organization playing a significant role in their decision to run for office for the first time, compared to only 8% of men.ⁱ

Two factors could contribute to this disparate result. The first is that men are more likely than women to claim internal motivation for running for office, as opposed to external encouragement. The second factor is that organizations may be more likely to recruit female candidates than male candidates. This follows directly from the fact that female state representatives are 20% more likely to belong to an organization or association than male state representatives.ⁱⁱ

Studies show that certain types of organizations are more likely to recruit women. According to a study on candidate emergence by Brian Fredericks and Barbara Burrell,ⁱⁱⁱ women are more likely to receive encouragement from interest groups than men are. Unsurprisingly, of the state representatives who noted organizational encouragement as an important factor in their decision to run for office, 29% of women compared to 4% of men reported encouragement from a women's group. Likewise, 22% of female respondents in the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study reported being contacted by a women's group with the mission of advancing women candidacies.^{iv}

Training Programs Give Women the Confidence They Need to Succeed in Politics

Although office-holders and parties tend to be the most effective at recruiting women to run for office, women's organizations provide unique opportunities for potential female candidates through their programming. Groups like Running Start, Emerge America, and Ready to Run sponsor and organize training programs for women across the county. Alumnae of Ready to Run, which is sponsored by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, have demonstrated a particularly impressive record. Of the 1,700 women who have participated

in its programming, over a quarter eventually ran for office, and of those who ran, 70% won their races.^v

It is especially important for women to participate in training programs when they are young. According to Dayna Stock, manager at the Sue Shear Institute in St. Louis, “the most effective role that organizations seeking to involve more women in running for elected office can play is in providing mentoring, training services, advice and models for young women to follow.”^{vi} In her study of four “NEW Leadership” training institutes for college women, she concluded that these resources stimulate political interest and efficacy, which are precursors to political ambition.

Enhanced political efficacy is particularly important for potential female candidates because women are less likely than men to think they are qualified to run for office, leading to a lack of political ambition. Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox describe self-perception as the “biggest barrier keeping women from emerging as candidates.” Their study found that men are 60% more likely than women to consider themselves “very qualified” to run for office, while women are twice as likely to describe themselves as “not at all qualified.”^{vii}

Unfortunately, not all women’s leadership organizations have been having as good a year as Ready to Run. Citing fundraising issues, The White House Project, a prominent voice for women’s leadership, closed its doors this January. The organization was founded in 1998, and aimed to advance women’s leadership in all sectors and communities – up to The White House. Primarily focused on leadership and campaign training for women, The White House Project trained thousands of women to run for office through its Vote, Run, Lead initiative. On the cultural front, the program worked to enhance the portrayal of female leadership in the media. While The White House Project’s closing was a significant blow to the women’s leadership movement, other organizations are working to fill the vacuum, including those focused on funding women candidates.

Funding: How Women’s PACs Level the Playing Field

There is a longstanding debate as to whether women have a more difficult time raising campaign funds than men. Those who believe women face a larger hurdle point to the fact that women tend to have fewer personal resources than men, and that their personal and professional networks include fewer people likely to give to a campaign.^{viii} Those who believe



women and men are on equal footing when it comes to fundraising point to studies like one conducted by Barbara Burrell, who found that women from the major parties have had campaign receipts on par with their male counterparts when controlling for incumbency. Further, she found that male and female candidates were able to garner the same amount of money from PACs.

There is little doubt that women’s PACs have been a great boon to many women candidates. The list of national PACs that have helped hundreds of women mount successful campaigns includes the Women’s Campaign Fund (founded in 1974 with a mission to achieve gender parity in elected office by increasing the number of pro-choice women of all parties serving), EMILY’s List (founded in 1985 with a mission to increase the representation of pro-choice Democratic women in elected office), and SHE-PAC (founded in 2012 with a mission

to recruit and fund conservative women candidates). There are also numerous examples of state PACs, the great majority of which are progressive rather than conservative.^{ix}

Particularly helpful is the emphasis these PACs place on early financial support, which is key to running a viable campaign. However, most women's donor networks provide funds exclusively to Democratic candidates, placing Republican women at a unique disadvantage. This disparity in donor networks may contribute to the disproportionate number of Democratic to Republican women in Congress and in state legislatures.^x

While women's PACs first emerged in the late 1980's and early 1990's, their rise to prominence began after 1992's "Year of the Woman". Another surge of women's PACs occurred after Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and Sarah Palin's vice presidential campaign in 2008, which brought an increase in PACs supporting conservative women.

In 2012, the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University reported the existence of 58 women's PACs and donor networks.^{xi} Of these organizations, 17 are national and 41 are state and locally based.^{xii} Several states have more than one such organization. California, for example, has 9 women's PACs and donor networks.^{xiii} The growth of these groups is particularly important because women as a group are disadvantaged by incumbency. Incumbents have an intrinsic advantage over challengers due to factors like greater name-recognition, better fundraising, and constituent services. As most incumbents are men, women begin with a competitive disadvantage.

Another factor that makes these PACs so important is perception. Women believe they have a more difficult time raising campaign funds. A majority of female state representatives (56%) compared to a minority of male state representatives (9%) believe that it is harder for women to raise campaign funds.^{xiv} Female state legislators identify the three primary reasons for why it may be more difficult for women to raise money as: 1) women have different networks than men; 2) women feel less comfortable asking for money; and 3) women raise money from smaller donations.^{xv} Women of color are more likely than white women to cite different networks as the main reason women have more difficulty raising funds.^{xvi} Women's groups and PACs play a huge role in changing these perceptions. For some women, the prospect of early support is instrumental in their decision to run.^{xvii}

While organizations are doing excellent work training, recruiting, and funding women candidates, they can only do so much. Other major players in electoral politics must also step forward to lead the movement for gender parity in elected office.

ⁱ Carroll, S. J., & Sanbonmatsu, K. and Walsh, D. (2009). *Poised to Run: Women's Pathways to the State Legislatures*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Burrell, B., & Frederick, B. (2006, January). *Windows of Opportunity: Recruitment Pools, Gender Politics, and Congressional Open Seats*. Paper presented at the Southern Political Science Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA. Retrieved August 21, 2013, from <PDF>. 2012-06-24 from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p142297_index.html

^{iv} Lawless, J. & Fox, R. (2012). *Men Rule: The Continued under-Representation of Women in U.S. Politics*. *Women & Politics Institute, American University*. Retrieved August 21, 2013, from <http://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/2012-Men-Rule-Report-web.pdf>

^v Ready to Run: Overview. *Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University*. Retrieved September 16, 2013 from http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/education_training/ReadytoRun/RtoR_overview.php

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- ^{vi} Stock, D., (2011, November 11). Making Politics Personal: Leadership Programs as a Tool for Building Political Interest in College Women. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Northeastern Political Science Association, Crowne Plaza, Philadelphia, PA*. Retrieved August 21, 2013, from http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p526447_index.html
- ^{vii} Lawless, J. & Fox, R. (2012). Men Rule: The Continued under-Representation of Women in U.S. Politics. *Women & Politics Institute, American University*. Retrieved August 21, 2013, from <http://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/2012-Men-Rule-Report-web.pdf>
- ^{viii} Money and Women Candidates. *Political Parity*. Retrieved August 21, 2013, from <http://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/inventory-money.pdf>
- ^{ix} Women's PACs and Donor Lists: Contact Sheet 2013. (2013, August 14). *Center for American Women and Politics*. Forthcoming.
- ^x Money and Women Candidates. *Political Parity*. Retrieved August 21, 2013, from <http://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/inventory-money.pdf>
- ^{xi} Women's PACs and Donor Lists: Contact Sheet 2013. (2013, August 14). *Center for American Women and Politics*. Forthcoming.
- ^{xii} Ibid.
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} Carroll, Sanbonmatsu, and Debbie Walsh. "Poised to Run: Women's Pathways to the State Legislatures." (2009)
- ^{xv} Ibid.
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Ibid.