

# The Legislative Effectiveness of Women in Congress

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# The Legislative Effectiveness of Women in Congress

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## Abstract

A wide body of behavioral research has pointed to clear differences in the legislative styles and strategies of male and female lawmakers. Yet, much less is known about the impact of these behavioral differences on each group's legislative effectiveness. We engage this issue by exploring the progression of all public bills sponsored by men and women in the U.S. House of Representatives for the 93<sup>rd</sup>-110<sup>th</sup> Congresses (1973-2008). Consistent with women adopting legislative strategies of exerting high effort, consensus building, and issue specialization, we find conditions under which women are more effective lawmakers than their male counterparts. Specifically, minority party women are better able to keep their sponsored bills alive through later stages of the legislative process than are minority party men. The opposite is the case for majority party women, however, who counterbalance this lack of later success by introducing a greater amount, and a wider array, of legislation. These findings are particularly pronounced in women's issue areas, where both minority and majority party women dedicate more of their efforts, but to very different effects. Moreover, while the legislative tactics of minority party women have served them well consistently across the past four decades, the strategies of majority party women have become less successful as Congress has become more polarized.

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## **The Legislative Effectiveness of Women in Congress**

The last several decades have seen a significant rise in the number of women gaining access to political institutions in the United States. Since the late 1980s women have more than tripled their numbers in Congress, and now represent a record 17 percent of both the U.S. House and Senate. Not surprisingly, such an increase in female representation has spurred many questions about what differences, if any, exist between male and female legislators.

The scholarly literature that has emerged to engage these questions has suggested that, in many circumstances, gender is an important variable for explaining political behavior and legislative interactions. Numerous studies (e.g., Barnello and Bratton 2007; Boles 2001; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Burrell 1994; Carroll 2001; Poggione 2004; Reingold 1992; Saint-Germain 1989; Sanbonmatsu 2003; Swers 2002a; Thomas and Welch 1991, 2001) have demonstrated that female legislators are more likely than their male counterparts to sponsor “women’s issue” bills such as education, child-care, and family health legislation. Additional gender differences have also been found in leadership styles (Jewell and Whicker 1994, Rosenthal 1998), constituency service (Richardson and Freeman 1995; Thomas 1992) and communication patterns in hearings (Kathlene 1994). Taken together, this literature collectively points to discernable differences between the behaviors of male and female members of Congress.

Having identified these baseline differences, however, this line of research has only tentatively taken the next step to focus on whether and how these behaviors map into legislative outcomes. Separate from the literature on women and politics, a wide body of legislative scholarship has analyzed how parliamentary rules (e.g., Dion and Huber 1996), parties (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 2005), coalition leaders (e.g., Groseclose and Snyder 1996), the committee system (e.g., Krehbiel 1991), and other institutional features of Congress influence the creation

of public policies. These theories and perspectives are all, effectively, gender-neutral; and in light of the research noted above, one wonders whether this inattention to gender differences has limited our understanding of legislative politics and policymaking. For example, although we know that female lawmakers are more collaborative than their male counterparts (e.g., Rinehart 1991, Rosenthal 1998, Thomas 1994), it is not clear whether these more collaborative legislative styles might help or hinder women as they navigate the legislative waters to set the agenda, build coalitions, and broker deals to create laws. More generally, given that Congress (and the U.S. House, in particular) conducts its business according to well-specified rules and procedures, it is unclear what impact, if any, the underlying behavioral differences between men and women might have in regards to gender-specific differences in legislative effectiveness.

Engaging this question is particularly important given a surprising puzzle that has emerged from the literature: despite numerous potential institutional limitations that women have been documented to face<sup>1</sup>, female legislators have *not* been found to be systematically less effective in their lawmaking roles. Indeed, several studies suggest that female legislators may be as effective, or *more* effective, lawmakers than their male counterparts (Anzia and Berry 2009; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Jeydel and Taylor 2003; Saint-Germain 1989; Volden and Wiseman 2010). We suggest that an increased effectiveness in advancing their legislative agendas may be driven, in part, by several of the behaviors that scholars have attributed to female lawmakers. However, such effectiveness may also be *conditional* on how well the legislative behaviors of

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, as revealed by an open-ended survey of state-level lawmakers, approximately one-quarter of all women expressed concerns about discrimination, citing issues such as “getting people to respect me as a woman,” “being a woman in an old boys club,” “isolation of women members,” and “having my male counterparts deal with me on their level” (Thomas 2005, 252). It may not be surprising, therefore, that since the early 1970s, five percent of all men compared to one percent of all women held a committee chair in any given Congress; and in the 93<sup>rd</sup> through the 109<sup>th</sup> Congresses only *three* women held committee chairs in the U.S. House of Representatives, with two of them only serving a single term each as chair.

women match those strategies best suited to the institutional circumstances in which women find themselves.

Specifically, we draw on three prominent conjectures from the existing behavioral literature about the *high effort*, *consensus building*, and *issue specialization* of female legislators to develop hypotheses regarding the legislative effectiveness of men and women across the majority and minority parties and across multiple stages of the legislative process. We then test these hypotheses by drawing on a dataset of every bill introduced by men and women in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973-2008 to demonstrate the conditions under which women are more effective (or less effective) lawmakers in Congress than are men.

Our main findings suggest that high effort, consensus building, and issue specialization help female lawmakers achieve increased legislative effectiveness, but only under certain circumstances. For instance, the high effort and consensus building activities of women in the minority party lead to a greater proportion of their proposed bills receiving committee hearings, votes on the floor of the House, and passage into law, when compared to minority party men. Such consensus-building tactics, however, are perhaps less crucial and definitely less effective for majority party women, as their introduced bills are much less likely to receive committee hearings, votes, and be passed into law. Hence, the best that majority party women can do under these circumstances is to engage in a high-effort strategy of developing a larger portfolio of policy proposals, introducing much more legislation than majority party men, and working hard to keep some of these proposals alive through later legislative processes. Such tactics result in about the same number of enacted laws-per-member for majority party men and majority party women. The differences in behaviors and their effectiveness between majority and minority

party women are even starker in recent polarized Congresses and in the areas of public policy commonly referred to as “women’s issues.”<sup>2</sup>

Our results follow from quantitative analyses of the fate of all 138,246 bills introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives over the past four decades. While such an approach provides the broad outlines of conditions under which women are more effective at advancing their sponsored legislation than are men, it is also limited in a variety of ways. First, in looking at the progression of bills through Congress, we are studying only one form of the “effectiveness” of lawmakers. Members of Congress advance their own interests and those of their constituents not only through their sponsored legislation, but also through a complex set of activities ranging from managing large staffs, to negotiating behind-the-scenes deals, to fundraising, to bringing home projects to the district, and beyond. Gender differences across this range of activities also merit study, but such an enterprise is beyond the scope of our present research. Second, while we uncover broad patterns that may result from such activities as high effort or consensus building, we are not currently able to establish the exact mechanisms that produce our aggregate patterns. As such, future work is needed to clarify the manner in which effort and/or consensus building activities influence lawmaking, which remain as conjectures in our work.

Third, we recognize the inherent limits of the quantitative approach taken in this study. More specifically, some scholars (e.g., Duerst-Lahti 2002a, 2002b; Hawkesworth 2003; Kenney 1996) suggest that the subtleties of conversational dynamics, norms of masculinity, and

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<sup>2</sup> There has been much debate (e.g., Bratton 2002; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Little, Dunn, and Deen 2001; Saint-Germain 1989; Poggione 2004; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002b; Thomas 1991, 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991; Wolbrecht 2007) concerning the definition and operationalization of “women’s issues.” Some scholars define women’s issues as any issue area that has been traditionally associated with women or the “private” realm (e.g., healthcare and education), while others focus solely on policies that have a direct and explicit impact on women (e.g., sexual discrimination). This paper uses the most inclusive definition possible, thus allowing us to test and help define what women’s issues actually are. Therefore, following previous literature, we define women’s issues as those dealing with abortion, sexual discrimination, women’s health, children and family, education, welfare, poverty, social services, general health, and the environment. Bratton (2005, 106) provides a comprehensive overview of how the literature has defined women’s issues.

gendering of institutions may all be better understood by employing various qualitative methods. Our study seeks to complement such qualitative work; and, taken together, these different methodologies can present the most complete picture of the role that women play within legislative institutions. Finally, since our data are focused solely on the U.S. House of Representatives, we cannot speak to gender and effectiveness in the U.S. Senate, in state legislatures, or in international political bodies. Our hope is that the arguments and findings that are presented in this paper can be applied more broadly in future work.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

In motivating our analysis, we rely upon three conjectures in the current literature about the behavior of women in legislatures that may influence their legislative effectiveness. First, we suggest that the *High Effort* of female lawmakers may enhance their overall legislative effectiveness. Since the political world has traditionally been “a man’s business” (Githens and Prestage 1977, 339), female legislators may feel that they “have to work harder than men to be equally successful and respected” (Reingold 1996, 475).<sup>3</sup> Consistent with this argument, Reingold (1996, 475) finds that “fewer Arizona women than men felt that they had the latitude or ability to be successful without working extremely hard.” Therefore, it is not surprising that, in a nationwide survey conducted by the Center for American Women and Politics, 74% of female state legislators reported working harder than their male colleagues (CAWP 2001). Ann Richards playfully summed up this notion by declaring that “Ginger Rogers did everything Fred

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<sup>3</sup> A growing body of work explores Congress as a gendered space. As Acker (1992, 567) explains, “taken as more or less functioning wholes, the institutional structures of the United States and other societies are organized along lines of gender. The law, politics, religion, the academy, the state, and the economy...are institutions historically dominated by men, and symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of men in leading positions, both in the present and historically. These institutions have been defined by the absence of women.”

Astaire did, only backwards and in high heels.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to these performance pressures, women may also be exerting higher levels of effort because they are concerned with a greater number of causes and constituents, as a result of “surrogate representation.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Congresswomen may feel that it is their responsibility to represent all women, even those outside of their district’s borders (Carroll 2002),<sup>6</sup> which may lead to them cultivating diverse and substantial legislative portfolios. In sum, surrogate representation, combined with the possibility that women may feel an increased pressure to perform, create the foundation of the High Effort Conjecture.

Second, the propensity of women to engage in *Consensus Building* may bolster their legislative effectiveness. Previous research has argued that there are discernable differences between the political approaches employed by male and female lawmakers, with women being more collaborative and consensual, and men being more individualistic and competitive (e.g., Jeydel and Taylor 2003; Rinehart 1991; Rosenthal 1998; Thomas 1994).<sup>7</sup> For example, using the group decision making experiment first proposed by Miller and Oppenheimer (1982), Kennedy (2003) finds that female subjects are more likely to desire universalistic outcomes and group cooperation, whereas male subjects are more likely to prefer competitive solutions, contributing to female majority groups being more likely to arrive at unanimous and consensual decisions. Although these feminized strategies of cooperation, conciliation, and consensus building have been theorized as hindering female legislators in national politics, we argue that

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<sup>4</sup> Lawless and Fox (2005) provide further examples and an excellent discussion of this topic.

<sup>5</sup> As Mansbridge (2003, 522) describes, surrogate representation is “representation by a representative with whom one has no electoral relationship.”

<sup>6</sup> As Barbara Boxer explains, “There are still so few women in Congress...so you really do have to represent much more than your own state...women from all over the country really do follow what you do and rely on you to speak out for them” (Carroll 2002, 53).

<sup>7</sup> Duerst-Lahti (2002a, 23) outlines a comprehensive overview of proto-attributed gender differences. Masculine traits are individuation, instrumental, rule-focused, dominate, power over, competition, hierarchy, speak out, public sphere, breadwinning; feminine traits are connection, contextual, relationship focused, collaborate, power to, cooperation, web-center, listen well, home sphere, caregiving.



these leadership approaches may be valuable under certain political circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

Specifically, these strategies may help female legislators effectively work with members in the majority party coalition, even when they are members of the minority party.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the Consensus Building Conjecture might lead to the expectation that minority party women are more effective than their male counterparts because they are able to form cross-party bridges in ways that are difficult for men.

Third, women may become more effective lawmakers as a result of *Issue Specialization* strategies. Scholars have demonstrated that there are distinct differences between the policy priorities of male and female legislators, with females being more likely to care about “women’s issue” bills (e.g., Barnello and Bratton 2007; Carroll 2001; Poggione 2004; Sanbonmatsu 2003; Swers 1998, 2002a, 2005; Thomas and Welch 1991, 2001). Not only are female legislators more likely to vote for issues of concern to women (Swers 1998), but they are also more likely to sponsor women’s issue legislation (Bratton 2005; Gerrity, Osborn, Mendez 2007; Saint-Germain 1989).<sup>10</sup> Recent evidence of this issue specialization strategy can be seen in the debates over health care reform, as friends and colleagues of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi argued that expanding health care became one of her top legislative priorities because “she is a woman and a mother.” Pelosi herself noted that “it’s personal for women...my sisters here in the Congress, this was a big issue for us” (Bzdek 2010). Importantly, it seems that this type of issue

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<sup>8</sup> Since Congress has been, and continues to be, a masculinized institution, these traits that are typically ascribed to women are thought to be undervalued, or even detrimental. And although increased “feminization” in leadership styles has occurred at the state level (Jewell and Whicker 1994), it appears as if legislative professionalism and feminization are negatively related (Duerst-Lahti 2002b).

<sup>9</sup> As Senator Barbara Mikulski claims, female legislators “check our party at the door and work really on civility” (Alvarez 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Swers (2005), for instance, finds that being a female representative is one of the most consistent predictors of sponsoring education, children and family issues, women’s health, and general health issues legislation. Moreover, these specialized policy portfolios seem independent of constituency concerns, as Gerrity, Osborn and Mendez (2007) demonstrate that a woman who replaces a male incumbent sponsors more women’s issue legislation than the previous incumbent, despite representing the same district.

specialization persists across party lines, as several studies have noted that Republican women are more likely to introduce women's issue legislation than are Democratic men (e.g., Carroll 2001; Swers 2005). To the extent that women can translate their interest in particular issues into policy success, the Issue Specialization Conjecture may be clearly linked to the legislative effectiveness of women.<sup>11</sup>

As can be seen, the conjectures that female legislators are more likely to engage in high effort, consensus building, and issue specialization arise from extensive research on the behavior of women in legislatures. However, much less is known about how these behaviors affect the advancement of legislation sponsored by women or their ultimate effect on the adoption of new public policies. We explore such links and argue that they depend critically on such institutional factors as party status, different stages of lawmaking, and types of policy proposals. Specifically, plausible differences may well arise in the quantity and substance of bills that are introduced by men and women, in the experiences of female members of the majority and minority parties seeking to move bills through the legislative process, and in female legislators being rewarded for their expertise in certain policy issues. We investigate these possibilities by employing a novel dataset designed specifically to capture legislative effectiveness across five stages of legislative policymaking, from bill introduction to passage into law, spanning the 93<sup>rd</sup> - 110<sup>th</sup> Congresses (1973-2008). This dataset allows us to investigate not only which legislators are successful at moving their bills through the legislative process, but also what types of bills are most likely to be enacted into law. As such, we are able to establish the conditions under which women are more effective than their male counterparts at lawmaking, as well as the extent to which these patterns of effectiveness are consistent with the above behavioral conjectures.

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<sup>11</sup> Issue specialization and hard work should not necessarily be viewed as contradictory strategies. In fact, if women are working harder because of surrogate representation, then they would automatically be specializing in women's issues. Moreover, hard work can be devoted to either a broad or a narrow legislative agenda.

To do so, we consider how our three conjectures may result in varying degrees of effectiveness in light of three considerations central to understanding lawmaking in Congress: majority vs. minority party status, early vs. later legislative stages, and differing issue areas. While these three considerations are not exhaustive of the relevant institutional contexts of lawmaking in Congress, each is seen as so important as to generate a significant literature upon which we can build. For example, because of the crucial role that party plays in Congress (e.g., Aldrich 1995, Cox and McCubbins 2005), our initial area of inquiry concerns whether and how legislative effectiveness is influenced by majority and minority party status.<sup>12</sup> The High Effort Conjecture would suggest that, regardless of party status, women will be more productive than their male counterparts, due to their hard work needed to overcome gender biases. In addition, the pull of surrogate representation, and the increased legislative portfolio that may accompany it, should be relevant to women regardless of whether they are in the majority or minority party. In fact, Carroll (2002, 56) finds that “with few exceptions, a commitment to representing women was widely shared by congresswomen regardless of their party, ideology, race, ethnicity, tenure in office, or institutional position.”

While the High Effort Conjecture may pertain equally to both majority and minority parties, the Consensus Building Conjecture may not be as party-neutral. The propensity of women to be “better at working across the aisle” (Alvarez 2000) may serve mainly to enhance the effectiveness of women in the minority party. Since members of the majority party could exclude the minority party rather than collaborate and cooperate, consensus building may not necessarily advantage female members in the majority. In fact, under conditions of parties

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<sup>12</sup> Because of such intriguing work as Carroll (2001) and Swers (2005), in the analyses that follows, we also controlled for legislators’ party affiliations (i.e., Republican or Democratic) and found that party affiliation has no substantive bearing on legislators’ effectiveness; rather, the crucial consideration is, indeed, majority or minority party status.

polarized against one another but internally united, one might expect bipartisan consensus-building to give way to strong majority party rule (e.g., Rohde 1991), which could favor more typically male strategies. The propensity of female lawmakers “to bring people together” (Carroll 2002, 61) may be less rewarded under such circumstances. Jeydel and Taylor (2003) find some evidence of this claim, in that minority party female legislators fared better than majority party females (in comparison to their male counterparts) at getting their introduced legislation passed into law. Drawing on these arguments, we arrive at our first hypothesis.

***Party Difference Hypothesis:*** *Women in the minority party are more effective than men due to high effort and consensus building. Women in the majority party are more effective than men due to high effort but may be hindered by their consensus building tendencies.*

The Party Difference Hypothesis suggests that overall legislative effectiveness may differ by party status. Moreover, the above conjectures lead us to believe that further differences should arise across various stages of the legislative process. First, the High Effort Conjecture would suggest that women in both the majority and minority party will generally introduce more legislation than men. In other words, the increased performance pressures of being a woman, combined with feeling “a responsibility to represent those concerns of women in addition to representing the concerns of their districts” (Dodson 1998, 130) should result in women having larger legislative portfolios than their male counterparts.

Once a bill is introduced, however, hard work may only move sponsored legislation so far, as further movement depends on institutional positioning and leadership strategies. And, as noted above, we argue that potentially effective strategies for members of the majority party are quite distinct from effective strategies for those in the minority. Specifically, while “leadership styles that lean more towards consensus building may be less efficient and not as conducive to

moving an issue through the legislative process” (Kathlene 1995, 187) for majority party members, they are essential for members in the minority party. Since members of Congress are responsible for assembling “a coalition that will carry the bill to passage,” (Tamerius 1995, 103), it is essential for minority party members to be able to cooperate and work across the aisle in order to build enough support to push their bills through the pipeline. If, as the Party Difference Hypothesis suggests, consensus building is essential for minority party women and ineffectual for majority party women, these different effects should be most evident in later legislative stages, such as in committee, on the floor, and in the enactment into law.

***Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis:** Women in the minority party will introduce more legislation than their male counterparts, and their effectiveness will increase in stages that depend on consensus building. Women in the majority party will introduce more legislation than their male counterparts, but their effectiveness will diminish in later legislative stages.*

In addition to party differences and differences in legislative advancement, the effectiveness of women in Congress may vary dramatically by issue area. As noted previously, the literature has clearly demonstrated that female legislators are more likely to care about, and take action on, women’s issues. Theoretically, there are several reasons why we might expect this type of legislative agenda to translate into increased effectiveness. Previous research demonstrates that female politicians are viewed as better suited to handle policies regarding education, the environment, and social welfare, whereas male politicians are considered experts in foreign policy, crime, business, and agriculture (Burrell 1994; Fox and Oxley 2003; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Leeper 1991). Thus, legislators may be more willing to support bills that are introduced by women if they fall within one of these women’s issue domains.<sup>13</sup> In fact, interview data illustrate how “both female and male representatives [feel] that women in elected

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<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it is on these issues that women have shown a propensity to cross the aisle (Swers 2005), which would increase their chances of legislative success, perhaps differently depending on majority party status.

office have a better sense of how to develop and implement feminist policy as a result of their life experiences” (Tamerius 1995, 102); and Thomas (1991, 1994) and Saint-Germain (1989) point to this pattern in lower state houses.<sup>14</sup> Hence, even though gender may be a factor that hinders women in most legislative settings, it may actually bolster their effectiveness in areas that are traditionally framed as feminine.

Alternatively, it may be the case that female legislators specialize in women’s issues, yet they do not necessarily receive deference in these areas. Since female lawmakers continue to have trouble feeling respected as women (Thomas 2002), their issue specialization may go unrecognized or be underappreciated. Moreover, given the fact that “governance, politics, and the administrative state reflect the cultural preference for masculine over feminine” (King 1995, 69), women’s issue bills may fail to receive any type of advantaged treatment.<sup>15</sup> Hence, we may not see any differences in effectiveness based on the substantive content of the bills. Thus the same patterns as in the Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis may emerge, perhaps even more strongly, for women’s issues. Taking these two opposing possibilities into consideration, we arrive at our third and fourth hypotheses.

***Women’s Issues Deference Hypothesis:*** *On women’s issues, women will introduce more legislation and experience greater levels of success than men across every stage of the legislative process.*

***Women’s Issues Differences Hypothesis:*** *On women’s issues, women in the minority party will introduce more legislation than their male counterparts, and their effectiveness will increase in stages that depend on consensus building. On women’s issues, women in the majority party will introduce more legislation than their male counterparts, but their effectiveness will diminish in later legislative stages.*

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<sup>14</sup> More specifically, Thomas (1991) finds that bills pertaining to women, children, and families had a success rate of 29% when introduced by women, but only 13% when introduced by men.

<sup>15</sup> McDonagh (2009) offers a broader version of this argument in comparative context.

Taken together, these hypotheses seek to translate well-established behavioral conjectures into specific conditions under which female legislators attain an equal, or greater, degree of effectiveness than their male counterparts, despite the numerous obstacles that they might face. The next section discusses how we test these hypotheses.

### **Empirical Approach**

To investigate these hypotheses, we rely upon a multi-stage method of analysis that identifies the success of each member's sponsored legislation at each stage of the legislative process, from bill introduction to enactment into law.<sup>16</sup> Such an approach allows us to determine if women are more effective than their male counterparts on the whole, as well as from which stage(s) of the legislative process, and for which party, this enhanced effectiveness is derived. Furthermore, we also compare the progress of legislation by issue area, to determine whether women are focusing their attention on women's issues; and, if so, whether or not they receive deference for their expertise.

We therefore build upon previous work by Volden and Wiseman (2010), in which they develop a Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES) for each member of Congress based on how many bills each legislator introduces, as well as how many of those bills receive action in committee, pass out of committee and receive action of the floor of the House, pass the House, and ultimately become law.<sup>17</sup> Unlike a typical "hit-rate" analysis that looks only at bill conversions from introductions into law, this type of analysis can account for whether there are gender differences in the quantity of bills introduced, and how successful the bills are throughout key intermediate stages of the legislative process.

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<sup>16</sup> Here we are therefore setting aside cosponsorship and amendment activities, as well as non-bill-related activities and other potential determinants of effectiveness for members of Congress.

<sup>17</sup> For a more thorough description of this process, see Volden and Wiseman (2010).

In addition to tracking each member's bill successes, the LES method also accounts for bills' varying levels of substantive importance. For example, dedicating a statue can arguably be achieved with less legislative effort than passing the Family and Medical Leave Act. To account for such variation, Volden and Wiseman (2010) categorize all bills as being commemorative/symbolic, substantive, or substantively significant.<sup>18</sup> After classifying each bill into one of these three categories, the LES is calculated for each member  $i$  in each Congress  $t$ , as follows:

$$LES_{it} = \left[ \begin{aligned} & \left( \frac{\alpha BILL_{it}^C + \beta BILL_{it}^S + \gamma BILL_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum_{j=1}^N BILL_{jt}^C + \beta \sum_{j=1}^N BILL_{jt}^S + \gamma \sum_{j=1}^N BILL_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \\ & + \left( \frac{\alpha AIC_{it}^C + \beta AIC_{it}^S + \gamma AIC_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum_{j=1}^N AIC_{jt}^C + \beta \sum_{j=1}^N AIC_{jt}^S + \gamma \sum_{j=1}^N AIC_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \\ & + \left( \frac{\alpha ABC_{it}^C + \beta ABC_{it}^S + \gamma ABC_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum_{j=1}^N ABC_{jt}^C + \beta \sum_{j=1}^N ABC_{jt}^S + \gamma \sum_{j=1}^N ABC_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \\ & + \left( \frac{\alpha PASS_{it}^C + \beta PASS_{it}^S + \gamma PASS_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum_{j=1}^N PASS_{jt}^C + \beta \sum_{j=1}^N PASS_{jt}^S + \gamma \sum_{j=1}^N PASS_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \\ & + \left( \frac{\alpha LAW_{it}^C + \beta LAW_{it}^S + \gamma LAW_{it}^{SS}}{\alpha \sum_{j=1}^N LAW_{jt}^C + \beta \sum_{j=1}^N LAW_{jt}^S + \gamma \sum_{j=1}^N LAW_{jt}^{SS}} \right) \end{aligned} \right] \left[ \frac{N}{5} \right],$$

where the five large terms represent the member's fraction of bills (1) introduced, (2) receiving action in committee, (3) receiving action beyond committee, (4) passing the House, and (5)

<sup>18</sup> A bill is deemed substantively significant if it had been the subject of an end of the year write-up in the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. A bill was deemed commemorative/symbolic if it satisfied any one of several criteria such as providing for a renaming, commemoration, private relief of an individual, and so on. And lastly, all other bills (as well as "commemorative/symbolic" bills that were also the subject of a *CQ Almanac* write-up) were categorized as substantive.



becoming law, relative to all  $N$  legislators. Within each of these five terms, commemorative bills are weighted by  $\alpha = 1$ , substantive bills by  $\beta = 5$ , and substantively significant by  $\gamma = 10$  in line with Volden and Wiseman's earlier analysis. The overall weighting of  $N/5$  normalizes the average LES to take a value of 1 in each Congress.

Several features of this construction are worth noting. First, because of the substantial differences in the number of bills that are introduced (138,246 bills over our time period) and the number of bills that advance to further stages (5,907 becoming law, for example), this operationalization necessarily gives greater weight to members who are more successful in later stages of the process (e.g., having a bill pass the House or become law) than earlier stages of the process (e.g., bill introduction or action in committee). Thus, if women are introducing more bills than their male counterparts, but are less successful at getting their bills passed into law, we should see this reflected in their LES values. Moreover, since this approach uses the number of bills passing through each stage, rather than the percentage of bills, a seemingly insignificant coefficient may actually be quite telling. For example, if women are introducing significantly more bills than men, but have similar numbers passing the House, this means that a lower percentage of the bills that a woman introduces are advancing through the pipeline.

In order to test our hypotheses, we begin by estimating a series of OLS regressions where the dependent variable is a member's Legislative Effectiveness Score. Since several of our hypotheses concern the difference between women in the majority and minority parties, we include indicator variables for whether a legislator is *Female*, and either a *Majority Party Female* or a *Minority Party Female*.<sup>19</sup> A *Lagged Effectiveness Score* is incorporated into the analysis to control for the fact that members are expected to have consistent interest and innate

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<sup>19</sup> See the Appendix for a description of all of the independent variables.

abilities from one Congress to the next. *Seniority* and its squared value measure the number of terms that the member has served in Congress, which helps to capture the institutional influence that might be acquired by more senior members (and the squared value allows the seniority effect to taper off over time).<sup>20</sup>

*State Legislative Experience* is a dummy variable that captures whether a member served in the state legislature prior to entering Congress. As Carroll (2004, 6) points out, “many of the women who run for Congress have gained experience and visibility in state government before seeking federal office.” In fact, over 40% of the female Representatives in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress had served in their state’s legislative body (Carroll 2004, 6), which one might expect would translate into increased effectiveness. Because state legislatures vary significantly in their professionalism, we also interact State Legislative Experience with an updated version of Squire’s (1992) *Legislative Professionalism* measure to account for the possibility that members who served in more professional state legislatures will be more effective in Congress.

*Majority Party* is a dummy variable for whether a member is in the majority party, which is thought to be important for policy advancement generally. *Majority Party Leadership* accounts for whether a member is among the leadership (majority party leader, deputy leader, whip, and deputy whip), with a similar variable included also for *Minority Party Leadership*. *Speaker* is a dummy variable for the Speaker of the House; *Committee Chair* captures whether a member is a chair of a standing committee; and *Power Committee* captures whether a member serves on the Rules, Appropriations, or Ways and Means Committees. All of these variables are particularly relevant as controls for this analysis, as female legislators have been generally less

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<sup>20</sup> While seniority is relevant to any investigation of legislative effectiveness, it is especially important to consider in the context of gender and politics. The “Year of the Woman,” when female legislators gained 19 seats in the House, did not occur until the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, and it was not until the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress that women made up more than 15% of the House. Therefore, many female legislators have fewer years of experience than their male counterparts, which may be related to their abilities to be effective lawmakers.

likely to attain these positions of influence, and we are interested in women's effectiveness when accounting for these institutional differences.<sup>21</sup>

*Distance from Median* captures the absolute distance between the member and the chamber median on the DW-NOMINATE ideological scale (built upon Poole and Rosenthal 1997), to control for the possibility of more centrist members offering proposals that are more likely to find their way into law. Since previous research has demonstrated that female lawmakers are more liberal than their male counterparts, especially when in the Republican Party (e.g., Burrell 1994; Swers 1998, 2005), this variable is particularly relevant to our study.

Members' personal characteristics, including *African American* and *Latino* are incorporated because they have been shown to be important in earlier studies of effectiveness. Approximately 23% of the women that are currently serving in Congress are women of color, and minorities make up a larger proportion of the female delegation than of the male delegation.<sup>22</sup> *Size of Congressional Delegation* within the member's state captures the possibility of natural coalitions among members who share the same state constituencies. *Vote Share* and its square are included to allow for the possibility that members from safe seats can dedicate greater time and effort to internal legislative effectiveness rather than external electioneering, and to allow this effect to be nonlinear.

In addition to these regressions, below we also consider the number of bill introductions and success rates by issue area, for majority and minority party members. These analyses allow us to determine whether women are engaging in issue specialization, and if so, whether they receive deference for developing expertise in these areas.

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<sup>21</sup> As one example, even though women make up an all-time high of 17% in the current Congress, they still comprise less than 10% of the Ways and Means Committee. Similarly, as noted previously, few women have ever attained a committee chair.

<sup>22</sup> For example, African American women comprised approximately 13% of all female Representatives, while African American males represented less than 7% of all men in the House, over our period of study.

## Results

### *Majority and Minority Party Status*

Our first area of inquiry concerns how majority and minority party status may impact the legislative effectiveness of women. To reiterate, the Party Differences Hypothesis states that women in the majority party benefit from high effort but may not be rewarded for trying to achieve consensus across parties, whereas women in the minority party benefit both from high effort and from seeking consensus. Thus, to the extent that women in general are more effective in the LES measure as a whole, we expect women in the minority party to be driving such an overall finding. In order to test the hypothesis, we conduct two multivariate analyses with a member's overall LES value as the dependent variable. In the first analysis we include an independent variable for whether the member is female, which is meant to replicate earlier findings demonstrating that female lawmakers are generally more effective than their male counterparts, all else equal. The second analysis, however, moves beyond existing findings by controlling for whether the female legislator is in the majority or minority party.<sup>23</sup> As Model 1 of Table 1 demonstrates, female members do appear to be more effective than their male counterparts. In fact, being a female lawmaker translates into approximately a 10% increase in legislative effectiveness, given the mean LES value of 1.0 in each Congress, a finding that is consistent with Volden and Wiseman (2010).

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<sup>23</sup> In the analysis that follows, we also considered how the aggregate number of women in the legislature might affect female legislators' effectiveness. As motivated by the "critical mass" literature (e.g., Kanter 1977), scholars have recently focused on whether and how increased numbers of female legislators impacts political behavior and policy outputs (Bratton 2005; Crowley 2004; Thomas and Welch 1991). We engaged this point in two ways. First, following the lead of previous research, we examined whether there was a significant increase in the legislative effectiveness of women after they reached the critical (i.e., Kanter 1977) threshold of 15% of the chamber, which occurred in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. Second, we also analyzed whether female legislative effectiveness increased over time, as the percentage of women in the chamber increased. In neither analysis did we find support for the presumed relationship between critical mass and legislative effectiveness.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

That being said, Model 2 suggests that this overall finding about gender and effectiveness appears to be driven mainly by women in the minority party. The coefficient for minority party female is positive, highly significant, and nearly double that for majority party women. Although the coefficient for majority party female fails to attain statistical significance, it is positive. Put into more concrete terms, when compared to the average member of their party, women in the minority are about 31% more effective, and women in the majority are about 5% more effective than their male counterparts, all else equal.<sup>24</sup> Taken as a whole, these results lend support to our Party Differences Hypothesis; minority party women seem to be more effective than minority party men, while majority party women are not significantly more effective than their male counterparts.

Anecdotal evidence abounds that men and women behave differently upon moving from the majority party to the minority party, or vice versa. For example, consider Representatives Carolyn Maloney and Charles Schumer. Both served as Democrats from New York in the majority party in the 103<sup>rd</sup> House of Representatives. Both introduced legislation on war crimes, and both had their bills bottled up in the Subcommittee on International Law, Immigration, and Refugees within the House Committee on the Judiciary. In the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, as minority party members under Republican control, Schumer chose to no longer even sponsor legislation on this topic, whereas Maloney built up her cosponsorship network, helped navigate her War Crimes Disclosure Act through three different committees, and won its passage through the House and

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<sup>24</sup> The relevant calculations for these percentages are based on the average Legislative Effectiveness Score among minority party members of 0.405 and among majority party members of 1.451.

eventually into law.<sup>25</sup> Across numerous other examples, highly partisan male lawmakers appear to take on a very different role when in the minority than they do when given more power. For instance, lists of the ten minority party members with the *lowest* Legislative Effectiveness Scores in each Congress during the era of Democratic control feature such names as Newt Gingrich, Tom DeLay, John Boehner, and Dick Cheney, none of whom would be thought of as ineffective upon gaining power.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

In addition to the aggregate analyses of Table 1, we also estimated regression models, using the specification for Model 2 for each Congress separately.<sup>26</sup> The regression coefficients for Majority Party Female and Minority Party Female over time are plotted in Figure 1. It is important to recognize that this figure represents the *relative* effectiveness of women as compared to men. Taking the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress as an example, the LES gap of 0.8 between minority party women and majority party women is driven by the fact that women in the minority party are more effective than their male counterparts (with a 0.4 coefficient), whereas women in the majority are less effective than their male counterparts (with a coefficient of about -0.4). As can be clearly seen, compared to their male counterparts, women in the minority party have fared much better in every Congress other than the 93<sup>rd</sup>. The findings for majority party women are much more uneven, but appear to be divided into two eras. Prior to the 100<sup>th</sup> Congress (1987-88), majority party women outperformed majority party men in all but one Congress. However, in the eleven Congresses since 1987, majority party women have been *less* effective than their male counterparts in eight, whereas minority party women have maintained

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<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that Schumer stopped his bill sponsorship activities altogether in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress. Rather, it is the thousands of individual decisions like those in this example that bring about the overall statistical patterns uncovered in this paper.

<sup>26</sup> For the results depicted in Figure 1, the regressions did not include lagged dependent variables, as here we are looking at snapshots of the data rather than a cross-sectional time series.

their positive relative effectiveness. These results hold regardless of which party is in the majority, with comparable lengths of Democratic and Republican rule during this period.<sup>27</sup>

Why is it that since the 1990s minority party women have continued to fare so well, while majority party women have fared so poorly? We speculate that the answer rests with the increased polarization in Congress over the last quarter century. Specifically, the ability to work across the aisle, build consensus, and compromise remain important traits for a minority party member in times of highly partisan politics, but they are eclipsed by such typical masculine tactics of competition and rule-based domination for majority party members. As such, Figure 1 could be interpreted as presenting additional support for our Party Differences Hypothesis. However, as striking as these findings may be, it is difficult to fully understand gender and legislative effectiveness by only looking at these types of general analyses. The next section begins to unpack effectiveness by investigating the stages of the legislative process.

### *Stages of the Legislative Process*

As noted previously, our dataset allows us to investigate effectiveness across five stages in the legislative process: bill introduction, action in committee, action beyond committee, passage of the House, and becoming law. Taking these stages into consideration, the Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis suggests that women in both the majority and minority party will introduce more legislation than their male counterparts, but only women in the minority will be more successful than men at getting their bills through the legislative pipeline. In order to investigate this possibility we conduct five separate OLS regressions, one for each stage of the legislative process. In each analysis the dependent variable is the number of bills

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<sup>27</sup> Democrats held the majority for five sessions (100<sup>th</sup>- 103<sup>rd</sup> and 110<sup>th</sup>) and Republican held the majority for six sessions (104<sup>th</sup>- 109<sup>th</sup>).

reaching that stage, and the independent variables include majority party women, minority party women, and the additional controls considered above.<sup>28</sup>

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Model 3 in Table 2 demonstrates how gender and party status impact legislative effectiveness at the bill introduction stage. Consistent with the High Effort Conjecture, we find that, after controlling for other relevant factors, women in both the majority and minority party introduce more bills than do their male counterparts. However, this effect is only statistically significant for women in the majority party. In substantive terms, women in the majority party introduce 3.3 more bills than majority party men, which translates into about 17% more introductions on average by majority party women when compared to majority party men. On the other hand, women in the minority party introduce only 0.61 more bills than their male counterparts all else equal, an increase that translates into approximately 4% more bills being introduced by minority party women than by minority party men.

Moving to the second part of the Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis, Models 4-7 illustrate how gender and party status impact effectiveness in the stages after bill introduction. With the exception of the number of bills receiving action in committee, the coefficients for minority party female are positive and statistically significant in every stage of the legislative process. For example, the coefficient of 0.197 for Action Beyond Committee indicates that for every five minority party women, there will be one more bill that reaches the floor of the House. A similar pattern also holds for whether a bill passes the House and for whether a bill becomes law. In relative terms, the average minority party woman has a 29%

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<sup>28</sup> Notice that here bills are not weighted by their commemorative or substantive nature, nor by any measure of their substantive significance.



greater volume of sponsored legislation reaching the floor of the House and 30% more laws resulting from her sponsored legislation than does the typical minority party man.<sup>29</sup>

For majority party women, the insignificant coefficients for stages after bill introductions are telling. Because they introduce substantially more bills than their male counterparts, the insignificant findings across Models 4-7 indicate that majority party women are experiencing less success than their male counterparts at every stage after bill introduction. For example, although majority party women average more than three additional bill introductions than their male counterparts, this advantage is completely erased within the congressional committee structure.<sup>30</sup>

Taken as a whole, our findings support the Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis. Although female legislators in both the majority and minority party are introducing more legislation, only minority party women are more successful than their male counterparts in pushing their bills through the legislative pipeline. In fact, majority party women are significantly less likely than their male counterparts to get the bills that they introduce passed into law. Coupled with earlier analyses above, these findings suggest that, although female legislators in both parties tend to work harder by introducing greater amounts of legislation, only women in the minority party are finding success at stages that depend on consensus building. These findings lend support to the notion that the ability to work across the aisle is much more of an important legislative asset when members are in the minority party.

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<sup>29</sup> On average, minority party members have 0.674 pieces of legislation reach the floor in any Congress and 0.336 sponsored bills become law.

<sup>30</sup> A clear illustration of this decreased effectiveness can be seen when we model effectiveness as the percentage of a member's sponsored bills passing through each subsequent stage. In auxiliary analyses (not presented here), we find that the coefficients for majority party female are negative and statistically significant for action in committee, action beyond committee, passage of the House, becoming law, and overall success. For example, being a majority party female is associated with a 6% lower likelihood of each introduced bill passing into law. Thus, the finding that majority party women are about equally as effective as their male counterparts (Model 2) is strongly influenced by the fact that majority party women introduce many more bills than their male counterparts, but then experience less subsequent success across every further stage of the legislative process.

Before delving into our final area of investigation, issue specialization, it is important to note several auxiliary findings from our regression analyses. First, being a committee chair significantly increases a member's effectiveness at every stage of the process. For example, committee chairs average six more bill introductions, five more bills receiving action beyond committee, and two more bills being signed into law (some of which may result from chairs sponsoring bills on behalf of their committees). Second, seniority is positively associated with legislative effectiveness. An increase from one to five terms served in Congress translates into approximately six additional bills introduced, and one additional bill receiving action beyond committee. Since women have not yet attained comparable levels of seniority to their male counterparts, nor been awarded equivalent numbers of committee chairs, they appear to have been structurally disadvantaged. Their enhanced number of introductions and subsequent legislative success in the minority party only partially offset these limitations.

### ***Issue Specialization***

Although we have found support for both the Party Differences and Legislative Advancement Differences Hypotheses, it is unclear whether these general patterns hold across all issue areas, or whether such support might be driven in part by deference given on women's issues. Thus, our last area of investigation concerns whether women are engaging in any type of issue specialization and, if so, how this specialization impacts legislative effectiveness. We are particularly interested in whether female legislators experience heightened legislative effectiveness in women's issue areas, or conversely, if the cross-party relationships that we demonstrated above exist across all policy realms. In order to investigate these possibilities we must first categorize all bills into their primary issue area.

Although there are a number of different ways that one could categorize each bill, we adopted the issue classification introduced by Baumgartner and Jones in the *Agendas Research Project*. In this classification scheme, each bill is assigned to one of nineteen major topics, which include such areas as civil rights and liberties, education, defense, and energy.<sup>31</sup> Since it was introduced, this coding scheme has been used for several large research projects, including the *Policy Agendas Project* (Jones, Wilkerson, and Baumgartner), and the *Congressional Bills Project* (Adler and Wilkerson). The *Congressional Bills Project* has, in turn, manually classified every bill from 1947 to the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress according to the coding system of the *Policy Agendas Project*; and it is from this dataset that we categorize our bills into issue areas for the 93<sup>rd</sup> – 107<sup>th</sup> Congresses (1973-2002).

In order to determine whether female legislators are engaging in issue specialization, we then separated the nineteen issue areas into either women’s issues or “other issues.” More specifically, drawing on how policy areas had been examined by earlier scholars, we identified six broad areas that scholars recognize as women’s issue areas: issues directly impacting women (e.g., sexual discrimination, equal pay), children/family, education, welfare/poverty/social services, general health, and the environment (for examples, see Bratton 2002, 2005; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Poggione 2004; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002a, 2002b, 2005; Thomas 1992, 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991).<sup>32</sup> We then categorized the nineteen issue areas according to whether they fell within one of these six broad topics. For example, the topics of “social welfare” and

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<sup>31</sup> All of the topics can be seen in Tables 3 and 4.

<sup>32</sup> Although the environment may seem like a gender-neutral issue, previous research has operationalized it as a women’s issue (Little, Dunn, and Deen 2001; Reingold 2000; Thomas 1991, 1994). As can be seen in Tables 3 and 4, the nature of introductions and bill success rates for the environment actually better match “Other Issues” than women’s issues. Thus, the inclusion of the environment as a women’s issue seems to bias the findings against our main hypotheses.

“housing and community development” were coded as women’s issues because they corresponded to the broad category of welfare/poverty/social services.

After categorizing each of the nineteen issue areas, we then looked at patterns of introduction and success. For each issue area we tracked the percentage of women who introduced bills, the percentage of men who introduced bills, the average number of introductions by women, the average number of introductions by men, bill success rates for women, and bill success rates for men (where bill success is equivalent to the frequently examined “hit-rates” characterizing the percent of introduced bills that become law). This broad analysis allows us to identify whether women are engaging in issue specialization and how specialization impacts their legislative effectiveness.<sup>33</sup> Table 3 presents the introductions and successes for minority party members, with majority party members shown in Table 4.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Consistent with the body of literature connecting descriptive and substantive representation, in five of the eight women’s issue categories the percentage of women that introduce bills is significantly greater than the percentage of men that introduce bills. For example, 51.6% of minority party women introduce bills in the Law, Crime, and Family issue area, versus only 38.4% of minority party men; and 38.0% of minority party women introduce Education bills, compared to 29.1% of men. In fact, of all of the women’s issue areas, the percentage of men introducing bills is only significantly greater in one category – Social Welfare.<sup>34</sup> These results become increasingly intriguing when we look to the Other Issue categories. In nine of these eleven categories, the percentage of men introducing bills is larger

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<sup>33</sup> This methodology does, however, have limitations, as we are unable to differentiate between commemorative, substantive, and substantively significant legislation given the small number of bills in many of the nineteen categories.

<sup>34</sup> We use a chi-squared test to determine statistical significance.

than the percentage of women introducing bills. In fact, there are no Other Issue areas for which the percentage of women introducing bills is significantly greater than the percentage of men introducing bills. Similar findings also emerge when we consider the average number of bill introductions for women and men. In five out of the eight women's issue areas the average number of introductions by women is greater than the average number of introductions by men, although only one of these differences attains statistical significance. Conversely, in ten of the eleven Other Issue areas men introduce more bills than do women.

Looking to the final two columns of Table 3, it is clear that women in the minority party fare relatively well on women's issues when compared to their male counterparts. Although there are no statistically significant differences between the bill success rates of women and men, females do have slightly greater success in six of the eight women's issue areas. When coupled with their larger numbers of introductions, this leads to more laws-per-member in women's issue areas originally sponsored by minority party women than by minority party men. However, these women are less effective than their male counterparts when we move to the Other Issue areas. Out of these eleven issue areas, men are significantly more successful in Agriculture, Foreign Trade, International Affairs, and Science & Technology, while the only category for which women are more effective is Government Operations. Taken as a whole, this table demonstrates that women are clearly engaging in issue specialization. Yet, while women do achieve relatively greater success in the women's issue areas than in the Other Issue areas, it does not appear as if they experience significant deference for their expertise, as their success rates are statistically comparable to men on women's issues.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Turning in Table 4 to majority party members who are not committee chairs, we see further intriguing patterns.<sup>35</sup> First, female legislators in the majority party are clearly specializing on women's issues. In six of the eight women's issue areas the percentage of women introducing bills is significantly greater than the percentage of men introducing bills, and in five of the eight women's issue areas the average number of bill introductions for women is greater than it is for men. For example, the percentage of majority party women introducing bills in the category of Law, Crime, and Family is 59.3%, whereas the comparable percentage for majority party men is 39.5%. With regards to the Civil Rights & Liberties issue area, female legislators in the majority party introduce an average of 0.932 bills, while men only average 0.374. This increased sponsorship productivity for women, however, only occurs for women's issue areas; in only one of the eleven Other Issue areas is the percentage of women introducing bills greater than the percentage of men introducing bills, and on four "Other Issues" the percentage of men introducing bills is significantly greater than the percentage of women who introduce these bills. Moreover, in nine of the eleven Other Issue areas the average number of bill introductions by men exceeds the average number of bill introductions by women, often significantly so.

As was the case with minority party women, majority party women are clearly engaging in issue specialization. However, unlike minority party women, majority party women are not achieving equal success rates in women's issue areas. In fact, there are *no* women's issue areas for which women achieve higher success rates than their male counterparts, and in *five* of the eight women's issue areas majority party men are actually significantly more successful than majority party women. For example, men achieve a success rate of 2.83% in education, whereas

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<sup>35</sup> It is important to exclude committee chairs from this analysis given their high rates of activity, high success rates, and significant gender differences. However, given the small number of chairs, the results uncovered here change little upon the inclusion of chairs.

women only achieve a 0.62% rate. This pattern is also repeated in the categories of Civil Rights & Liberties, Health, Housing & Community Development, and Social Welfare. Male legislators are also more effective in the Other Issues areas; there are *no* categories under which female legislators attain significantly greater bill success rates, while male legislators have significantly higher success rates in Agriculture, International Affairs, and Macroeconomics. It is also in these three categories that women have *never* had their sponsored bills enacted into law across the three decades of our study, even when they enjoyed majority party status.

Taken together, these results fail to offer clear support in favor of the Women's Issue Deference Hypothesis; although women specialize in women's issues, they are not given deference for their expertise. Even though women in the minority party may be doing better in the women's issue areas than in the Other Issue areas, this increased success merely translates into bill success rates that are on par with their male colleagues. Meanwhile, women in the majority party are clearly less successful on women's issues than are men, indicating little or no deference whatsoever.

All of these findings do, however, present support for the Women's Issue Differences Hypothesis. Women in the minority party seem to be doing much better than their majority party counterparts. Whereas majority party women are significantly less successful than their male counterparts in eight of the nineteen issue areas, minority party women are only significantly less successful in four. As was the overall pattern uncovered earlier, equal success rates and greater introductions enhance the effectiveness of women in the minority party on women's issues. Majority party women are less successful across the board than their male counterparts at advancing their sponsored legislation into law. Perhaps as a coping strategy, majority party women focus their efforts on introducing more women's issue bills.

## **Implications and Future Directions**

While a wide body of scholarship has demonstrated gender-based behavioral differences in legislatures, relatively less work has engaged whether, and how, these differences ultimately translate into changed public policies. This paper attempts to fill this gap by investigating the conditions under which women in Congress are more effective at moving their sponsored bills through the lawmaking process than their male counterparts. Moreover, it seeks to address how these patterns of effectiveness are related to the behavioral tendencies that have been specifically attributed to female lawmakers. In analyzing the fates of all bills introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973-2008, we uncover aggregate findings that suggest that high effort, consensus building, and issue specialization help female lawmakers achieve increased legislative effectiveness, but only under certain circumstances.

More specifically, on an aggregate measure of what men and women accomplish in their sponsored legislation in Congress, we found that women are more effective than men, upon controlling for their institutional positions and personal characteristics. However, such heightened effectiveness varies by party status and over time. In particular, while minority party women consistently outperform minority party men, the same is not true for majority party women. In the majority party, women were shown to be more effective than men throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but less effective than men in the 1990s and 2000s.

We also found that the effectiveness of men and women varies by stage of the legislative process. For women in the minority party, although they introduce slightly more bills than their male counterparts, their true effectiveness is seen in their ability to navigate these bills onto the floor of the House and into law. On the other hand, women in the majority party are less



successful at these later stages of the process, starting even with a relative inability to receive hearings and markups of their bills in committee. Despite introducing significantly more bills than their male counterparts, majority party women have nothing more to show for these efforts than majority party men in committee hearings, floor activities, bill passage, or laws enacted.

Finally, women in both the majority and minority parties target much more of their efforts to women's issues, but to similar effects as were found in the aggregate. Specifically, women in the minority are slightly more effective than men on these issues, while majority party women are much less likely to see their bills passed into law than are men, even on women's issues.

Taken together, these findings offer support for the Party Differences, Legislative Advancement Differences, and Women's Issue Differences Hypotheses, and are suggestive of the following narrative regarding women's legislative effectiveness. Put simply, women in Congress are disadvantaged in a variety of ways. Their newly rising numbers mean that they have lower levels of seniority (throughout our dataset women average 3.7 previous terms in Congress compared to 5.3 for men); and because seniority-based institutions effectively limit women's influence (by default), these institutional differences across genders (and perhaps other considerations) result in bills sponsored by women (especially those in the majority party) being more likely to die in committee and less likely to ultimately become law. Moreover, on traditionally women's issues (where women in Congress exert a disproportionate share of their efforts), the gridlock rates for proposals are much higher than on other issues.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For example, less than three percent of bills became law in seven of eight of the policy areas that we labeled women's issues, with an average success rate of 2.10% for all women's issue bills. In contrast, the success rate exceeded three percent on eight of eleven other issue areas, averaging a 5.00% success rate for all bills in these categories.

In response to these disadvantages, women in Congress adopt a series of legislative tactics common to female legislators elsewhere, including high effort, consensus building, and issue specialization. As a result of these tactics, and controlling for women's lower levels of seniority and lesser frequency in committee leadership, women emerge as more effective lawmakers than their male counterparts on the whole. Unfortunately, these legislative tactics do not serve all women in Congress equally well. Whereas high effort and issue specialization do lead women to introduce more bills on women's issues, these are the areas least likely to find legislative success. Moreover, while consensus building benefits women in the minority party, this collegial strategy of majority party women seems to be dominated by the highly partisan and polarizing strategies adopted by majority party men, especially in recent Congresses.

In sum, we find a variety of circumstances under which women in Congress have achieved legislative effectiveness, but also areas where success is much less likely to come by. This work thus complements and sheds light on earlier findings in the literature. Consistent with earlier works, there do seem to be strong institutional hurdles for women to overcome in advancing their legislative agendas in Congress. Also consistent with past research, women seem to adopt clear strategies to overcome these obstacles. Finally, perhaps the inconsistent results previously uncovered in the literature of women being less, more, or equally effective in some state legislatures and some sessions of Congress arise from variance across these settings in the institutional factors that contribute to the translation of women's behavioral tendencies into their legislative accomplishments.

While our work therefore builds upon previous work and provides some key pieces to the puzzle regarding the legislative effectiveness of women, some significant holes remain in the overall picture. We conclude by highlighting five remaining questions as fruitful lines of future

research. First, one might ask whether more direct and substantial evidence could be generated in support of the conjectures advanced here of high effort, consensus building, and issues specialization of women in Congress? Although we found strong support for the hypotheses that were built upon these conjectures, our focus was not on establishing the validity of these underlying conjectures directly. High effort, for example, has been suggested here by the large number of introductions made by women, but is that broader agenda sustained later in the legislative process or are women and their agendas hurt by being stretched too thin? Similar questions can be explored regarding consensus building and issue specialization.

Second, what accounts for the differential effectiveness of majority party women over time? Majority party women seemed to be more effective than men in the 1970s and 1980s and less effective in the 1990s and 2000s, controlling for all other factors. We attributed this switch to the growing polarization in Congress making consensus-building activities less fruitful for majority party women. Much more evidence is needed to support this claim, especially because there were also many other changes in Congress over this time period, including a significant increase in the number of women in the body.

Third, why are women so unsuccessful in promoting their sponsored bills in committee? In examining patterns of effectiveness across stages of the legislative process, it is startling how frequently the bills introduced by women receive no attention in committees whatsoever. Studies of decisions in congressional committees regarding which bills to advance and which to ignore, and the nature of subsequent committee hearings and markups, with a specific focus on issues of gender, would be most welcome.

Fourth, why do women not receive deference on women's issues and why are women's issues more likely to be struck in legislative gridlock? Upon looking across issue areas, one of

the most surprising findings was the degree to which women's issues are characterized by inaction and obstruction, with an overall success rate less than half that in other issue areas. This finding merits further study, especially exploring why majority party women concentrate their efforts in these areas with very little relative success.

Fifth and finally, how can women further overcome the obstacles they face to legislative effectiveness in Congress? While we identify the overall patterns for women in Congress, by no means do these patterns of behavior characterize the legislative activities of each and every woman in the House. If consensus building by majority party women is indeed ineffectual and if a focus on women's issues is doomed to failure, why are these strategies not altered or abandoned? Here, qualitative analyses of the different paths that women take in advancing their agendas may be quite insightful.

We conclude with one brief example of a woman who deviated slightly from the tactics discussed here to great effect recently. As noted by one account, "Congress had tried to hammer together a national health-care initiative for a century, but it wasn't until a woman ascended to a key position of power in Washington that a plan actually passed" (Bzdek 2010). The author goes on to say that Nancy Pelosi would not give up on health care because of its essential impact on women (issue specialization), that she exerted high effort in the health care battle, and that she was a consensus builder. The key differences from most women in our analyses are the institutional position Pelosi is in (Speaker of the House) and the fact that the consensus she sought to build was *within* the Democratic Party, rather than *across* parties. This last element may point a way forward for majority party women given the polarization across parties so prevalent in recent Congresses.

**Appendix: Data sources, definitions, and descriptive statistics**

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Majority Women	Equals “1” if member is a majority party woman	0.042	0.201
Minority Women	Equals “1” if member is a minority party woman	0.045	0.208
Seniority <sup>a</sup>	Number of terms served by member in Congress	5.164	3.958
State Legislative Experience <sup>a</sup>	Equals “1” if member served in state legislature	0.487	0.500
State Legislative Professionalism <sup>b</sup>	Squire’s index of state professionalism relative to Congress	0.142	0.177
Majority Party	Equals “1” if member is in the majority party	0.569	0.495
Majority Party Leadership <sup>a</sup>	Equals “1” if member is in majority party leadership	0.016	0.125
Minority Party Leadership <sup>a</sup>	Equals “1” if member is in minority party leadership	0.017	0.131
Speaker <sup>a</sup>	Equals “1” if member is Speaker of the House	0.002	0.042
Committee Chair <sup>c</sup>	Equals “1” if member is a committee chair	0.051	0.220
Power Committee <sup>c</sup>	Equals “1” if member serves on Rules, Appropriations, or Ways and Means	0.251	0.434
Distance from Median <sup>d</sup>	Member <i>i</i> ’s DW-NOMINATE score – Median member’s DW-NOMINATE score	0.424	6.322
African-American <sup>a</sup>	Equals “1” if member is African-American	0.065	0.246
Latino <sup>a</sup>	Equals “1” if member is Latino/Latina	0.035	0.185
Size of Congressional Delegation <sup>e</sup>	Number of districts in state congressional delegation	18.35	13.99
Vote Share <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of vote received in previous election	68.53	13.89

*Data sources:*

<sup>a</sup>Constructed by authors based on *Almanac of American Politics*, various years.

<sup>b</sup>Constructed by authors based on updates to Squire (1992).

<sup>c</sup>Constructed by authors based on Nelson (1992) and Stewart and Woon (2005).

<sup>d</sup>Constructed by authors from DW-NOMINATE scores provided by Keith Poole.

<sup>e</sup>Constructed by authors.

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**Table 1: Determinants of Legislative Effectiveness**

	Model 1: Overall LES	Model 2: Overall LES
Female	0.101*** (0.039)	
Majority Party Female		0.071 (0.070)
Minority Party Female		0.126*** (0.034)
Lagged Effectiveness Score	0.487*** (0.030)	0.487*** (0.030)
Seniority	0.059*** (0.015)	0.059*** (0.015)
Seniority <sup>2</sup>	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.002* (0.001)
State Legislative Experience	-0.072 (0.058)	-0.072 (0.058)
State Legislative Experience × Legislative Professionalism	0.333* (0.183)	0.0334* (0.184)
Majority Party	0.626*** (0.033)	0.631*** (0.035)
Majority Party Leadership	0.150 (0.145)	0.154 (0.146)
Minority Party Leadership	-0.076 (0.065)	-0.077 (0.065)
Speaker	-0.482* (0.265)	-0.485* (0.269)
Committee Chair	1.894*** (0.191)	1.893*** (0.191)
Power Committee	-0.224*** (0.037)	-0.224*** (0.037)
Distance from Median	0.0003** (0.0002)	0.0003* (0.0002)
African-American	-0.217*** (0.073)	-0.218*** (0.073)
Latino	0.011 (0.077)	0.010 (0.077)
Size of Congressional Delegation	-0.00004 (0.002)	-0.0001 (0.002)
Vote Share	0.030*** (0.011)	0.030*** (0.011)
Vote Share <sup>2</sup>	-0.0002*** (0.0001)	-0.0002* (0.0001)
Constant	-1.216*** (0.398)	-1.215*** (0.398)
N	6155	6155
Adjusted-R <sup>2</sup>	0.54	0.54

Results from Ordinary Least Squares regressions.  
Robust standard errors in parentheses, observations clustered by member.  
\* p < 0.1, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01 (two-tailed).

**Table 2: Determinants of Bill Progression in Congress**

	Model 3: Bill Introductions	Model 4: Action In Committee	Model 5: Action Beyond Committee	Model 6: Pass House	Model 7: Become Law
Majority Party Female	3.309** (1.638)	-0.054 (0.215)	0.119 (0.194)	0.068 (0.181)	-0.013 (0.131)
Minority Party Female	0.613 (1.236)	0.109 (0.124)	0.197** (0.090)	0.152** (0.077)	0.100** (0.048)
Seniority	1.908*** (0.241)	0.374*** (0.045)	0.253*** (0.034)	0.181*** (0.030)	0.062*** (0.019)
Seniority <sup>2</sup>	-0.084*** (0.016)	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.003* (0.002)	0.0001 (0.001)
State Legislative Experience	-2.617** (1.331)	-0.330 (0.209)	-0.193 (0.152)	-0.107 (0.126)	-0.076 (0.071)
State Legislative Experience × Legislative Professionalism	2.320 (3.772)	1.179* (0.675)	0.837* (0.502)	0.581 (0.406)	0.341 (0.214)
Majority Party	3.298*** (0.778)	1.793*** (0.120)	1.478*** (0.080)	1.173*** (0.068)	0.529*** (0.036)
Majority Party Leadership	-5.139*** (1.867)	0.187 (0.437)	0.511 (0.387)	0.576* (0.350)	0.479* (0.251)
Minority Party Leadership	-3.229 (2.273)	-0.535*** (0.191)	-0.357** (0.159)	-0.277** (0.141)	-0.132* (0.080)
Speaker	-15.237*** (2.060)	-3.586*** (0.479)	-2.237*** (0.465)	-1.663*** (0.440)	-0.573* (0.335)
Committee Chair	6.845*** (2.022)	4.636*** (0.535)	5.184*** (0.484)	3.978*** (0.373)	2.126*** (0.239)
Power Committee	-2.358** (0.990)	-1.282*** (0.142)	-0.927*** (0.106)	-0.697*** (0.087)	-0.199*** (0.052)
Distance from Median	-0.011*** (0.004)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.0004)	0.001* (0.0003)	-0.001*** (0.0002)
African-American	-6.041*** (1.339)	-0.690*** (0.171)	-0.460*** (0.143)	-0.371*** (0.123)	-0.212*** (0.072)
Latino	-6.195*** (1.749)	-0.027 (0.312)	0.271 (0.219)	0.258 (0.196)	0.118 (0.123)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.045 (0.036)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)
Vote Share	0.406** (0.204)	0.056** (0.025)	0.047** (0.020)	0.038** (0.018)	0.028*** (0.011)
Vote Share <sup>2</sup>	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.0004** (0.0002)	-0.0003** (0.0001)	-0.0002** (0.0001)	-0.002** (0.0001)
Constant	-5.911 (7.251)	-2.139** (0.899)	-1.892*** (0.713)	-1.481** (0.625)	-0.996*** (0.379)
N	7641	7641	7641	7641	7641
Adjusted-R <sup>2</sup>	0.06	0.31	0.38	0.34	0.27

Results from Ordinary Least Squares regressions.

Robust standard errors in parentheses, observations clustered by member.

\* p < 0.1, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01 (two-tailed).

**Table 3: Introductions and Success by Issue Area for Minority Party Members**

Issue Area	% of Women Introducing Bills	% of Men Introducing Bills	Avg. # Intros (Women)	Avg. # Intros (Men)	Bill Success Rate (Women)	Bill Success Rate (Men)
<b><i>WOMEN'S ISSUES</i></b>						
Civil Rights & Liberties	26.8%***	19.3%	0.520	0.384	1.54%	0.41%
Education	38.0***	29.1	0.620	0.556	0.65	0.42
Environment	32.4	33.6	0.540	0.665	0.74	1.47
Health	58.4***	42.8	1.96***	1.14	0.41	0.31
Housing & Community Development	19.0	21.2	0.284	0.344	0.00	0.11
Labor, Employment, & Immigration	52.8***	42.0	1.05	0.954	0.76	0.37
Law, Crime, & Family	51.6***	38.4	1.02	0.929	1.57	0.38
Social Welfare	28.8	35.6**	0.572	0.839**	1.40	0.05
<b><i>OTHER ISSUES</i></b>						
Agriculture	22.0%	24.5%	0.384	0.570*	0.00%	0.89%***
Banking & Commerce	39.2	41.8	0.764	0.886	1.57	0.71
Defense	37.2	36.4	0.668	0.884	1.20	0.89
Energy	15.2	29.0***	0.200	0.614***	4.00	1.02
Foreign Trade	26.8	30.1	0.512	0.724	0.00	0.92***
Government Operations	62.4	60.6	1.72	1.88	6.29*	4.07
International Affairs	20.8	19.4	0.368	0.331	0.00	1.54***
Macroeconomics	25.2	36.6***	0.404	0.856***	0.00	0.09
Public Lands	42.4	45.3	0.972	1.20	7.00	7.37
Science & Technology	15.2	16.0	0.180	0.234	0.00	0.67**
Transportation	30.8	36.4*	0.584	0.727	1.37	1.03

\*\*\* p < 0.01, \*\* p < 0.05, \* p < 0.10, on differences across genders, shown next to gender with higher value.

**Table 4: Introductions and Success by Issue Area for Majority Party Non-Chairs**

Issue Area	% of Women Introducing Bills	% of Men Introducing Bills	Avg. # Intros (Women)	Avg. # Intros (Men)	Bill Success Rate (Women)	Bill Success Rate (Men)
<b><u>WOMEN'S ISSUES</u></b>						
Civil Rights & Liberties	32.2%***	18.9%	0.932***	0.374	0.90%	2.46%**
Education	36.4**	28.9	0.682	0.628	0.62	2.83***
Environment	33.9	38.1	0.581	0.869**	2.19	4.19
Health	63.1***	44.9	2.59***	1.54	0.98	2.04**
Housing & Community Development	31.0**	24.1	0.674**	0.464	0.63	2.18***
Labor, Employment, & Immigration	51.3***	42.6	1.29	1.07	1.31	2.13
Law, Crime, & Family	59.3***	39.5	1.40*	1.12	3.02	3.15
Social Welfare	38.6	34.1	1.38*	1.03	0.61	1.69**
<b><u>OTHER ISSUES</u></b>						
Agriculture	14.4%	26.0%***	0.199	0.670***	0.00%	3.11%***
Banking & Commerce	43.6	47.4	1.07	1.26	3.56	2.92
Defense	44.5	39.1	1.23	1.09	3.44	4.96
Energy	31.8	34.7	0.581	0.890**	1.46	2.48
Foreign Trade	33.1	34.9	0.784	0.885	2.70	2.60
Government Operations	62.7	63.2	2.57**	2.01	7.58	7.11
International Affairs	19.1	21.7	0.314	0.413	0.00	7.05***
Macroeconomics	27.5	34.2**	0.555	0.758*	0.00	1.21***
Public Lands	41.5	48.7**	0.919	1.31**	15.2	11.9
Science & Technology	14.4	20.7**	0.216	0.352**	3.92	3.83
Transportation	37.7	38.2	0.763	0.879	2.78	4.01

\*\*\* p < 0.01, \*\* p < 0.05, \* p < 0.10, on differences across genders, shown next to gender with higher value.

**Figure 1: Relative Effectiveness of Majority and Minority Party Women**

