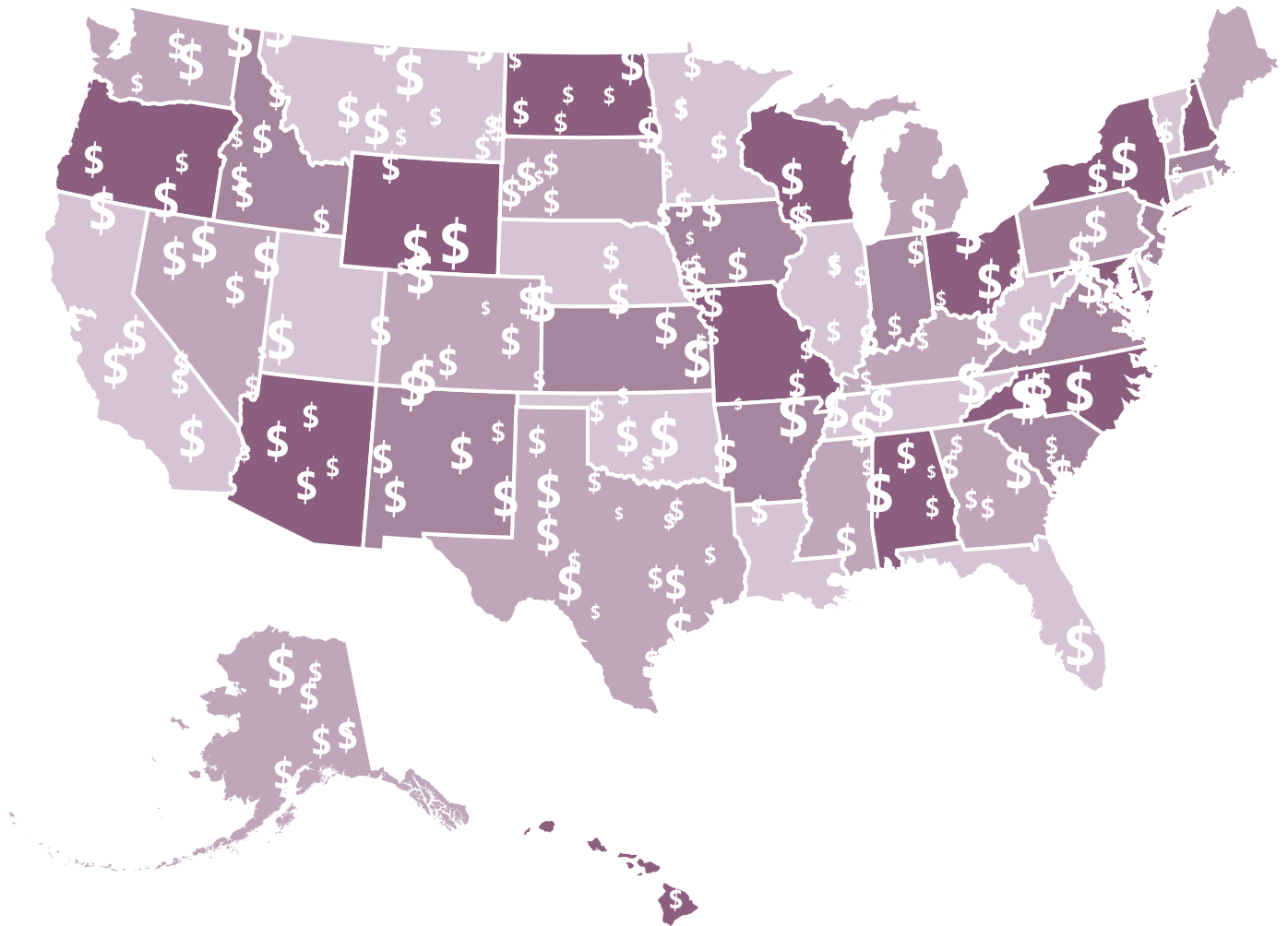


A CAWP Women, Money, and Politics Report

The Money Race for the State Legislature

Individual Contributions, 2020

By Kira Sanbonmatsu and Claire Gothreau



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The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the [Eagleton Institute of Politics](#) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about women’s political participation in the United States. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about the role of women in American politics, enhance women’s influence in public life, and expand the diversity of women in politics and government. Learn more at [cawp.rutgers.edu](#).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We investigate donor gender and candidate gender in our analysis of individual contributions to state legislative candidates in the 2020 general election. This report is made possible through a collaboration between [OpenSecrets](#) and the [Center for American Women and Politics \(CAWP\)](#).

Women do not exercise equal voice in state legislative elections.

More men than women donated to general election candidates for state legislative office in the 2020 election. The total amount contributed by men also exceeded the total amount contributed by women.

Men's advantage in giving stands in contrast to women's advantage in [voting](#): women out-vote men, but men out-give women.

Our finding about the gender disparity in giving to state legislative candidates is consistent with our previous research on [gubernatorial elections](#) and other [statewide executive elections](#).

Elections with women candidates appear to mobilize women donors.

Our report – which primarily focuses on single-member district general elections with two major-party candidates – finds that women donors were more likely to give to candidates in contests with at least one woman candidate.

Fewer women gave in contests with two men candidates than in contests with two women candidates and contests between one man and one woman.

Women are underrepresented as state legislative candidates and officeholders.

Women lag behind men in terms of officeholding at the state legislative level. Although representation at this level is slightly higher than women's representation in Congress, men are still a majority of officeholders.

Despite women's consistent underrepresentation as state legislative candidates and officeholders, there are a [record number](#) of women serving in state legislatures as a result of the 2020 election.

Black, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women are particularly underrepresented, consistent with other levels of office.

Women were more likely to contribute to Democratic candidates than Republican candidates.

Women were more likely to contribute to Democratic than Republican candidates. But candidate gender also mattered: within both parties, women were more likely to give to women candidates than men candidates.

The amount of funds raised from women donors depends on candidate gender and party.

Overall, men provided more of the money raised by state legislative candidates than women. But candidate gender, donor gender, and political party interact.

Thirty-three percent of money donated to Democratic men candidates for state senate and 39% of money donated to state representative candidates in woman v. man races was contributed by women donors. In contrast, about half of the money contributed to Democratic women state legislative candidates competing against Republican men came from women donors.

Women provided only 22% of the total contributions to Republican men state senate candidates and 26% of the total contributions to Republican men state representative candidates in woman v. man races. In contrast, contributions from women constituted about 35% of Republican women's receipts from individual donors in state legislative races against Democratic men.

In short, except for women's contributions to Democratic women candidates, men's contributions comprised a majority of the money raised by state legislative candidates.

On most indicators, Democratic women candidates fared similarly in fundraising in open-seat woman v. man races regardless of race/ethnicity. The absence of race/ethnicity effects indicate that women of color candidates were competitive monetarily.

Women candidates of color overwhelmingly identify as Democrats. On most indicators, Democratic women candidates raised comparable amounts regardless of race/ethnicity. This suggests that – at least at the general election stage – women candidates who run as Democrats fare similarly across racial/ethnic backgrounds.

However, there is some evidence that Democratic women of color who run as incumbents face a more difficult fundraising path.

Few women of color run for the state legislatures as Republicans, and those who do are usually disadvantaged compared with Republican women candidates who are white.

Very few women of color run for the state legislatures as Republicans. Those who do so are disadvantaged on several fundraising measures compared with white women candidates in woman v. man races. This suggests that the small number of Republican women of color candidates are not being nominated in the most competitive districts. Indeed, only 25 women of color serving as state legislators in 2021 identify as Republicans compared with 579 who identify as Democrats.

In open-seat woman v. man races, Republican women typically fared worse in fundraising than Democratic women.

Democratic women appear to be faring better than Republican women in the money race for the state legislature: Democratic women are more competitive financially with their opponents than are Republican women in woman v. man races.

Overall, women and men raised comparable amounts in woman v. man races, taking factors such as incumbency into account. But we find some evidence of gender differences in who contributes to their own campaigns.

In most cases, where there were gender differences in the amount of funds raised from self-financing, it is men candidates who were contributing more to their own campaigns. This difference in how money was raised may indicate a more difficult fundraising path for women. We also find that men were more likely than women to contribute to their own campaigns.

Race/ethnicity does not appear to interact in major ways among women with respect to the structure of receipts in woman v. man races. However, Democratic women of color state senate candidates were less likely than white women Democratic state senate candidates to contribute to their own campaigns.

Where there were gender differences in the amount of money raised from small contributions, it is usually women who raised more from small contributions than their men opponents.

Democratic women usually raised a larger share of money from small contributions than their Republican men opponents, which may indicate a more difficult fundraising path: raising money in smaller denominations may require more time than raising money in larger denominations.

The results were more mixed for Republican women running against Democratic men, though Democratic men usually raised more from small contributions. Democratic women raised more from small contributions than did Republican women.

INTRODUCTION

The 2018 and 2020 state legislative elections [broke records](#) for women’s candidacies and officeholding including the accomplishment of the first majority-female legislature in U.S. history. And, according to the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), new [records](#) were set for officeholding by groups of women traditionally underrepresented in politics: Asian American women, Black women, Latinas, and Native American women.¹

Despite these gains, women remain underrepresented as a share of all state legislators compared with their presence in the population. In 2021, women are 31% of all [state legislators](#). Just over one-quarter of women state legislators, or 26.5%, are [women of color](#). These women of color include 340 Black women, 134 Latinas, 55 Asian Pacific Islanders, 47 multi-racial women, 23 Native American/Alaska Native women, and 6 Middle East/North African women.

This report examines the status of women state legislative candidates in the 2020 money race. How did women fare? Were women candidates on an equal footing with men financially? How did race and ethnicity interact with gender to shape fundraising experiences? We examine party differences given that women are much better represented as Democratic than Republican state legislators: of women state legislators serving in 2021 who identify with one of the major parties, 67% identify as Democrats and 33% as Republicans. Notably, nearly all women of color state legislators – or 96% – identify as Democrats with only 4% identifying as Republicans. Just seven women of color state senators identify as Republicans.

We also analyze the status of women as donors to state legislative candidates. Our previous reports on races for [governor](#) and other [statewide executive offices](#) reveal significant gender disparities in giving. If women trail men in giving, they lack equal voice in state politics and may be less likely to see their preferred policies enacted.²

As states take different approaches to the COVID-19 pandemic, move to restrict voting rights, and adopt abortion restrictions, we are reminded that state politics and policies are integral to people’s daily lives.³

¹ Because CAWP recently began to collect data on Middle Eastern/North African identity, historical comparisons are not available.

² Kira Sanbonmatsu and Claire Gothreau, “Women Make Fewer Political Donations and Risk Being Ignored by Elected Officials,” [The Conversation](#) (August 13, 2021).

³ Andrew Demillo, “Arkansas judge blocks state from enforcing mask mandate ban,” *Washington Post* (August 6, 2021); Vanessa Williams, “Frustration and persistence for activists on the 56th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act,” *Washington Post* (August 6, 2021); Lisa Lerer, “Biden’s Silence on Abortion Rights at a Key Moment Worries Liberals,” *New York Times* (May 27, 2021); Elise Viebeck, “New Texas voting bill deepens growing disparities in how Americans can cast their ballots,” *Washington Post* (September 6, 2021).

And state policy choices resonate beyond a state's border: states are often called "laboratories of democracy" because a policy in one state may be adopted by other states or by Congress.⁴

Studies show that gender and race – as well as the intersection of gender and race – matter for legislative behavior and, ultimately, public policy. Life experiences that are gendered and raced, as well as enhanced relationships with constituents arising from shared identities, can shape legislative activity including bill sponsorship. Because women are a large and diverse group, women from a range of racial/ethnic, immigrant, partisan, ideological, and other identities are needed to fully capture the complexity of women voters.⁵ And beyond the impact in state legislatures, women with state legislative experience may go on to seek statewide and federal office including congressional office.⁶ Increasing women's representation at the state legislative level can facilitate gains at higher levels of office.

⁴ Craig Volden, "States as Policy Laboratories: Emulating Success in the Children's Health Insurance Program," *American Journal of Political Science*, 50:2 (2006),294-312. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00185.x, Vanessa Bouché, and Dana E. Wittmer. Gendered diffusion on gendered issues: the case of human trafficking. *Journal of Public Policy*, 35:1 (2015), 1-33. doi:10.1017/S0143814X1400021X; Christopher Mooney, *The Study of US State Policy Diffusion: What Hath Walker Wrought?* (Elements in American Politics) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). doi:10.1017/9781108956017.

⁵ Sue Thomas, *How Women Legislate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Luis R. Fraga, Linda Lopez, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, and Ricardo Ramirez, "Representing Gender and Ethnicity: Strategic Intersectionality," in *Legislative Women: Getting Elected, Getting Ahead*, ed. Beth Reingold, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 157-74; Tracy L. Osborn, *How Women Represent Women: Political Parties, Gender, and Representation in the State Legislatures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nadia Brown, *Sisters in the Statehouse: Black Women and Legislative Decision Making* (Oxford University Press; 2014); Mirya Holman, Anna Mahoney, "Stop, Collaborate, and Listen: Women's Collaboration in US State Legislatures," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 43:2 (2018),179-206. doi:10.1111/lsq.12199; Beth Reingold, Kirsten Widner, Kerry L Haynie, *Race, Gender, and Political Representation: Toward a More Intersectional Approach* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁶ Barbara Burrell, *Gender in Campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014). Data from CAWP show that 63% of the women serving in 2021 in the U.S. Senate and 43% of women serving in the U.S. House of Representatives have state legislative officeholding experience.

METHODOLOGY

This report is made possible through a collaboration between [OpenSecrets](#) and the [Center for American Women and Politics \(CAWP\)](#). OpenSecrets has provided initial candidate data (gender verified by CAWP), donor information, and vote totals. Research on campaign finance in the 50 states is difficult because states vary in their filing requirements and disclosure agencies. OpenSecrets provides an invaluable service to researchers and political practitioners by compiling and cleaning contribution data from all state disclosure agencies and by identifying donor gender. Meanwhile, CAWP offers researchers and the public the most reliable source of candidate gender, verifying the gender identity of candidates rather than relying on an algorithm to predict candidate gender. Together, CAWP and OpenSecrets are making accurate, detailed research on candidate gender and contributions in state contests possible on a large scale.

Our analysis focuses on an important source of candidates' total campaign funds: contributions from individual donors.⁷ We are also interested in these contributions because giving to politics is a form of political participation; analyzing donor gender is one way to assess the status of women in the electorate and gauge their potential for political influence. All donor analyses are based on OpenSecrets' estimates of donor gender using [Gender API](#).

We study major-party candidates in 2020, excluding the small number of candidates who did not report individual contributions and candidates who ran unopposed. We focus on general election races for the state house and state senate.⁸ Altogether, our analysis relies on 2.3 million contribution records from OpenSecrets. More details about our methodology can be found in the Appendix.⁹ Unfortunately, state legislative elections are not always contested by the two major parties: in 2020, 27% of general elections were not contested by the two major parties, according to an analysis by *Ballotpedia*.¹⁰ These uncontested races are excluded from virtually all of our analyses.¹¹

We recognize that our focus on individual contributions is just one aspect of how campaign finance shapes women's representation and participation. We are also cognizant that our aggregate approach does not address what motivated the giving we analyze, or whether the prospect of fundraising deterred potential

⁷ According to [research by the Campaign Finance Institute \(CFI\)](#), in almost all states the majority of campaign contributions to state legislative and gubernatorial candidates are from individuals rather than the parties or political action committees (PACs). Our report does not include independent spending, which has increased in state elections in the wake of the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision. For more information on the rise of independent spending, see [research from the CFI](#).

⁸ We categorize as "state house" the chambers known as the "Assembly" or "House Assembly" and include those candidates as state representative candidates throughout the report.

⁹ We exclude top two (jungle) primary contests. For these reasons, our numbers on women candidates may not directly correspond to CAWP's statistics about women candidates. Our measure of general election receipts includes all individual contributions from the complete cycle, including the primary.

¹⁰ [2020 election analysis: Uncontested races by state - Ballotpedia](#)

¹¹ We include uncontested races in calculations of the total contributions of women and men donors.

candidates from running. But other research demonstrates that gender and racial differences in personal finances and access to moneyed networks shape decisions about whether and how much to give, and whether to seek office.¹²

DONORS TO STATE LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES: ARE WOMEN EXERCISING EQUAL VOICE?

Women [out-vote](#) men. But women do not out-donate men, according to our analysis of OpenSecrets data for the 2020 state legislative election. (Our analysis focuses on single-member district general elections with two major-party candidates.¹³) Men's advantage over women in giving to state legislative candidates includes the total amount contributed – not just the share of contributors. Overall, our analysis reveals that women provided 32% of total funds contributed from individuals to all major party general election candidates in 2020 with men providing 68%.¹⁴ This means that men out-gave women 2:1 in all state legislative contests, regardless of the gender composition of candidates, whether both parties competed in the election, or the type of race. To the extent that campaign contributions can impact state legislative agendas and public policies, women are not exercising equal voice in state legislative politics.

¹² For studies of gender, race, and campaign finance see: Barbara Burrell, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Campaigning for Congress in the Feminist Era*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Nancy Burns, Key Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba, *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Barbara Burrell 2014; Michael H. Crespin, and Janna L. Deitz, "If You Can't Join 'Em, Beat 'Em: The Gender Gap in Individual Donations to Congressional Candidates," *Political Research Quarterly* 63 (2010), 581-593; She Should Run, *Vote with Your Purse: Lesson Learned; Women, Money, and Politics in the 2010 Election Cycle*, Report, (Washington, DC: She Should Run, 2012); Danielle Thomsen, and Michele L. Swers, "Which Women Can Run? Gender, Partisanship, and Candidate Donor Networks." *Political Research Quarterly* 70 (2017), 449-463; [PACs and Donors: Agents of Change for Women's Representation](#), RepresentWomen (June 2020); Melody Crowder-Meyer, and Rosalyn Cooperman, "Can't Buy Them Love: How Party Culture among Donors: Contributes to the Party Gap in Women's Representation," *Journal of Politics* 80 (2018): 1211-1224. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/698848>. See also Sarah Bryner and Grace Haley, "Race, Gender, and Money in Politics: Campaign Finance and Federal Candidates in the 2018 Midterms" (2019); Grumbach et al. (2020); Center for Responsive Politics, Common Cause, and Representation2020, [Individual and PAC Giving to Women Candidates](#), (Takoma Park, MD: Representation2020, 2016); Gbemende Johnson, Bruce I. Oppenheimer, and Jennifer L. Selin, "The House as a Stepping Stone to the Senate: Why Do So Few African American House Members Run?" *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (2012), 387-399; Grumbach et al. 2021.

¹³ The following states have [multimember districts](#) in at least one chamber: AZ, MD, NH, NJ, ND, SD, VT, WV. We exclude states and chambers with multimember districts unless the positions are elected separately. We focus on single-member districts in order to make comparisons within the same type of electoral system, although we include chambers with multimember districts in which candidates run for a specific position. Multimember district elections with positions, similar to single member district elections, enable us to compare fundraising statistics for the major parties' general election candidates. Throughout the report, we use "single member district" to be inclusive of multimember district elections that are elected by position.

¹⁴ This statistic excludes the states with jungle primary systems (CA, LA, and WA). MMDs are excluded. If states and chambers with MMD systems are included, the same 32% statistic is found. 44 states held regular state legislative elections in 2020.

Women's political action committees (PACs) and donor networks such as EMILY's List and VIEW PAC have cultivated women's giving and altered the calculus for women candidates.¹⁵ But gender, race, and class inequalities in socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and labor market opportunities continue to work hand in hand to create inequalities in political participation, particularly in political giving. Studies find that gender works intersectionally with other categories including race, yielding differences among women in the factors leading to participation. For example, Black women's political participation is arguably a paradox since they vote at high rates but command fewer economic resources than other women.¹⁶ The resources needed for particular forms of participation vary by race/ethnicity as well as gender, and factors such as group consciousness and recruitment can compensate for resource inequalities.¹⁷

We find that women were much more likely to make contributions to 2020 Democratic than Republican candidates in both state house and state senate elections.¹⁸ This difference comports with political behavior trends in which women are more likely to [identify with](#) and support the Democratic party than the Republican party.¹⁹

Further analysis reveals that donor gender interacts with candidate gender: in both parties, women were more likely to give to women candidates, producing a gender affinity effect in giving. But with the exception of Democratic women nominees in woman v. man contests, the money provided by men donors constituted the vast majority of funds in state legislative elections.

The gender of the candidates mattered: we found that the nature of the contest – whether the race is between two men, two women, or between a woman and a man – yielded slightly different results in terms of donor gender. Women were between 50 and 54% of donors to 2020 state house and state senate Democratic general election candidates in races with at least one woman candidate. In contrast, men comprised a majority of contributors to Democratic candidates in races featuring two men. Thus, women candidates and women donors appear to go hand in hand.²⁰

¹⁵ Burrell 1994; Christine L. Day, and Charles D. Hadley, *Women's PACs: abortion and elections*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall (2005); Peter L. Francia, "Early Fundraising by Nonincumbent Female Congressional Candidates: The Importance of Women's PACs," *Women and Politics* 23.1/2 (2001): 7-20; Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018.

¹⁶ Wendy G. Smooth. "African American Women and Electoral Politics: The Core of the New American Electorate." In *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics*. Ed. Susan J. Carroll and Richard L. Fox (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 171-197.

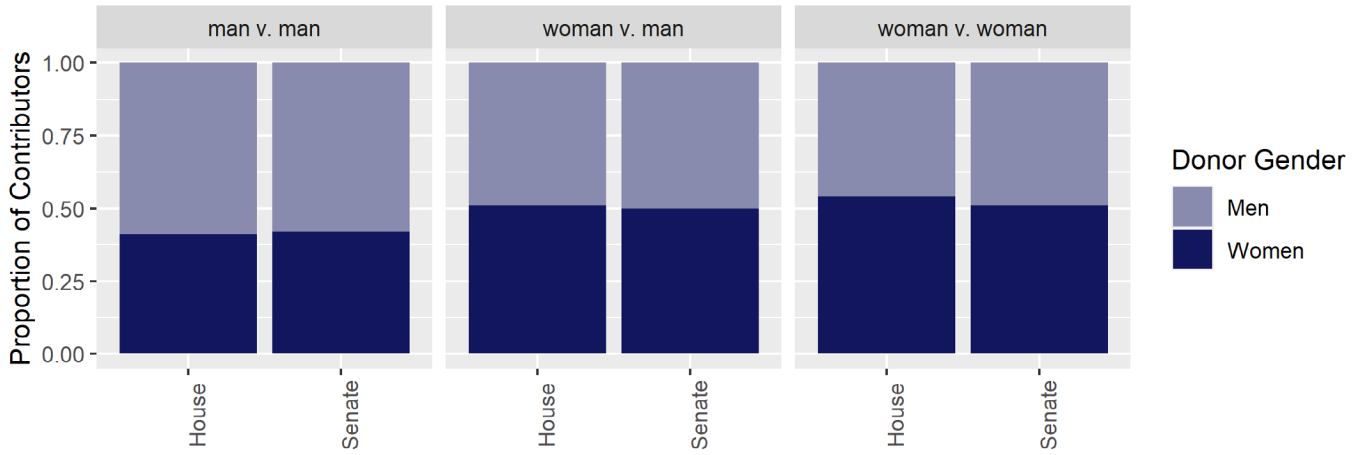
¹⁷ Henry E. Brady, Kay L. Schlozman, and Sidney Verba, "Prospecting for Participants: Rational Expectations and Recruitment of Political Activists," *The American Political Science Review*, 92: 4 (1998); Dennis Chong and Reuel Rogers, "Racial Solidarity and Political Participation," *Political Behavior* 27: 4 (2005), 347-374; Nadia E. Brown. "Political Participation of Women of Color: An Intersectional Analysis," *Journal of women, politics & policy*, 35:4 (2014), 315-348. doi:10.1080/1554477X.2014.955406; Emily M. Farris, and Mirya R. Holman, "Social capital and solving the puzzle of Black women's political participation," *Politics, groups & identities*, 2:3 (2014), 331-349. doi:10.1080/21565503.2014.925813.

¹⁸ Thomsen and Swers 2017; Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018.

¹⁹ Mary-Kate Lizotte. *Gender Differences in Public Opinion: Values and Political Consequences*. (Temple University Press; 2020); Christina Wolbrecht and Kevin Corder, *A Century of Votes for Women: American Elections Since Suffrage* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Laurel Elder, *The Partisan Gap: Why Democratic Women Get Elected But Republican Women Don't* (New York: NYU Press, 2021).

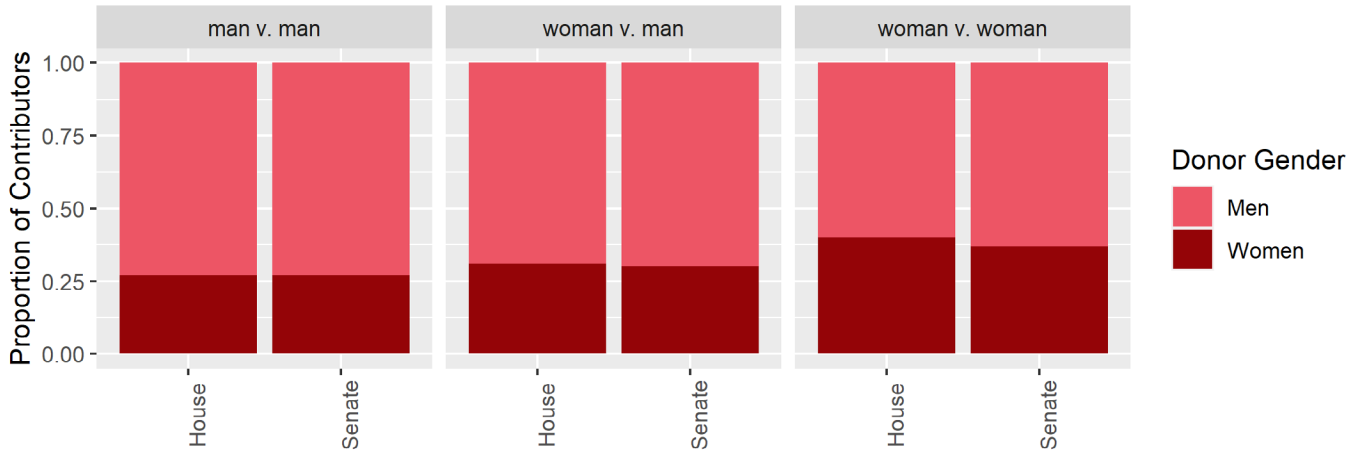
²⁰ The relationship of donor gender to candidate gender persists regardless of the race/ethnicity of the women candidates.

Contributors by Donor Gender (Democrats)



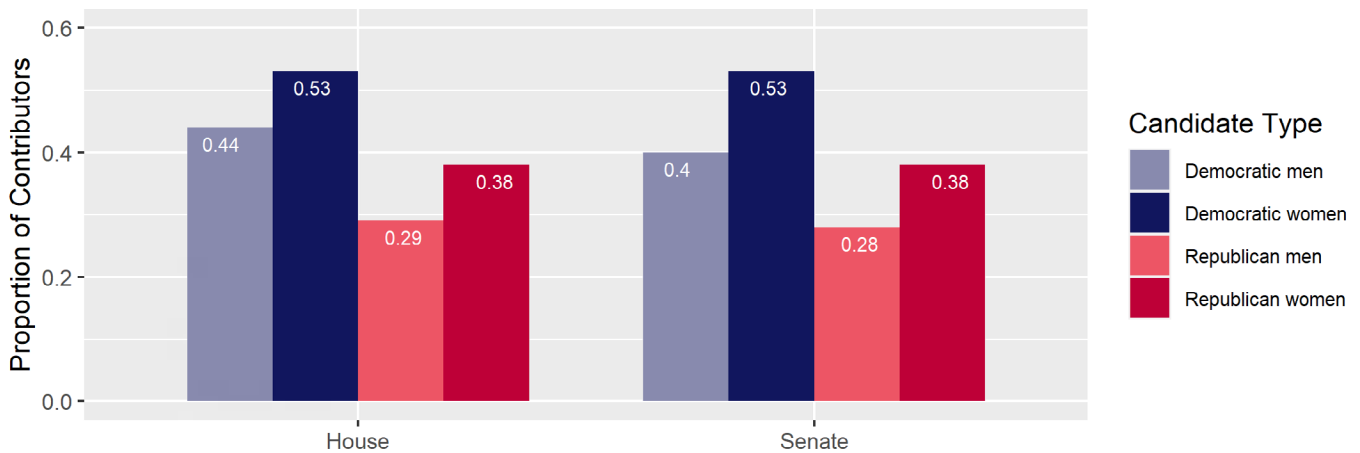
Data Source: CAWP and OpenSecrets
2020 State Leg. Elections
*Contested general elections

Contributors by Donor Gender (Republicans)



Data Source: CAWP and OpenSecrets
2020 State Leg. Elections
*Contested general elections

Proportion of Contributors Who are Women

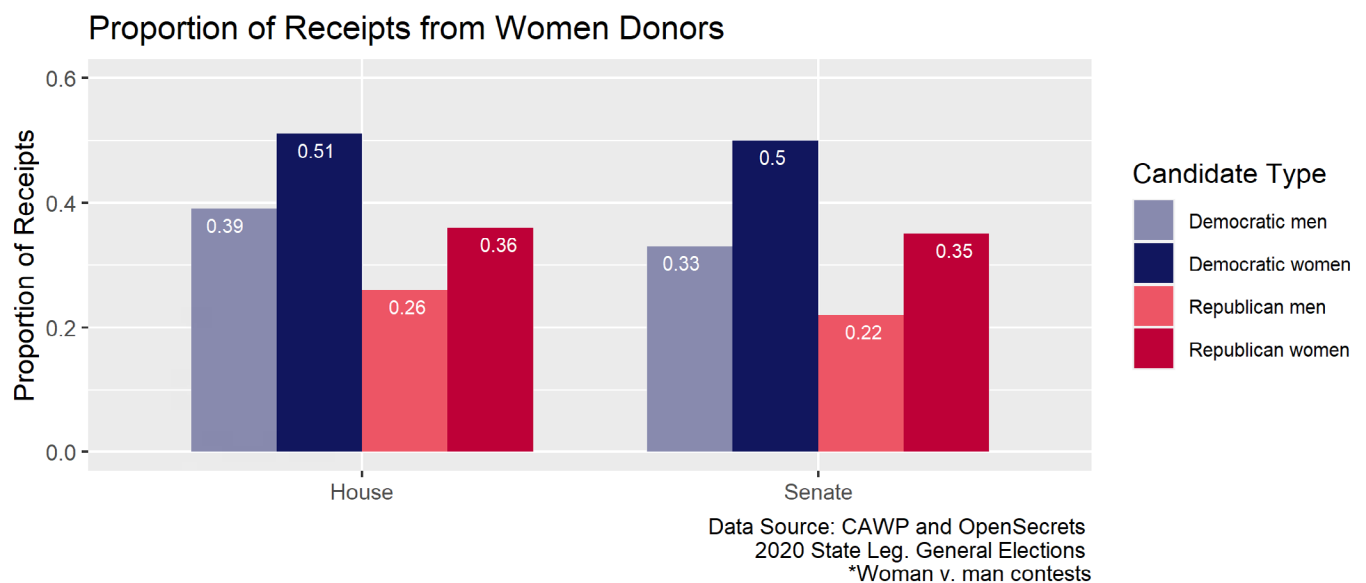


Data Source: CAWP and OpenSecrets
2020 State Leg. General Elections
*Woman v. man contests

Turning to funds raised by Republican general election candidates, women were better represented as donors in contests featuring at least one woman candidate than in contests with only men candidates. However, women were a smaller share of contributors to Republican than Democratic candidates in both chambers – even in woman v. woman contests. Women were best represented as contributors to Republican candidates in state senate races in which both parties nominated women: women composed 38% of contributors to Republican candidates in those races. But even this 38% statistic is lower than the comparable percentages for Democratic women; in races with a Democratic woman candidate, women were slightly advantaged over men as a share of donors.²¹

One of the most recent scholarly studies about political participation, authored by political scientist Nancy Burns and her colleagues, shows that gender gaps in participation such as joining a campaign or contacting an elected official have closed, most likely due to gains in women’s educational attainment over time.²² However, the gender gap in political giving persists, with women of color donors lagging other groups of contributors.²³

A closer examination of the data reveals that the relationship between donor gender and the amount of funds contributed depended on candidate gender and party. For two types of candidates – Democratic women state house candidates and Democratic women state senate candidates – contributions from women donors constituted about half of the money raised in woman v. man contests. In contrast, money from women donors made up 33% (state senate) and 39% (state house) of Democratic men candidates’ funds.



²¹ In woman v. woman races, the share of women contributors was similar: women were on average 54% of donors to Democratic state house candidates and 51% to Democratic state senate candidates; women were 40% of donors to Republican state house candidates and 37% to Republican state senate candidates.

²² Nancy Burns et al., “What’s Happened to the Gender Gap in Political Participation?” in *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women’s Political Activism*, Eds. Holly J. McCammon and Lee Ann Banaszak, (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2018), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190265144.001.0001>;

²³ Grumbach et al. 2021.

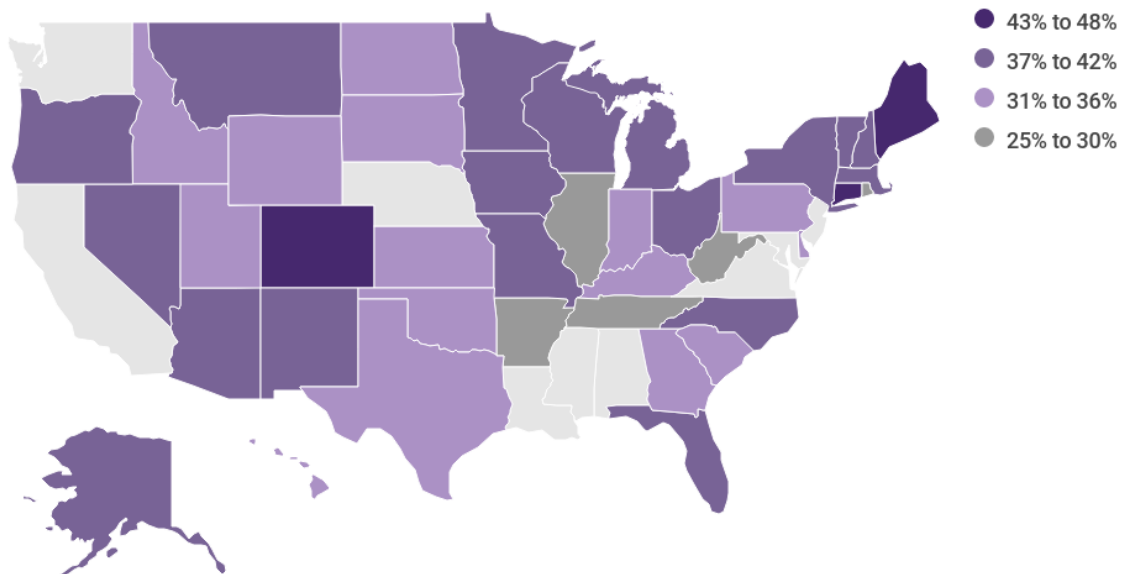
On the Republican side, looking at woman v. man contests, contributions from women only constituted about one-third of Republican women’s receipts from individual donors. The money provided by women to Republican men comprised an even smaller share of total receipts (26% for woman v. man state house races and 22% for woman v. man state senate races). Thus, except for the receipts of Democratic women nominees in woman v. man contests, the money provided by men donors constituted the vast majority of funds.

In sum, with the exception of contests featuring Democratic women candidates, men out-gave women and provided most of the total money raised. And overall, in assessing all giving regardless of candidate gender, men were much better represented as contributors and provided most of the money raised in state legislative elections. These gender differences mean that men’s political voice – as measured by campaign contributions – is louder than women’s in state legislative elections.²⁴

Cross-state variation in gender and giving

Looking across the nation, we learn that the relationship between donor gender and contributions depends on state. Using a map of 2020 state legislative elections, we can examine how women fared as a percentage of contributors.²⁵

Women as a Percentage of Donors 2020 State Legislative Races



Data Source: CAWP and OpenSecrets

*States that held regular elections in 2020 are included; states with nonpartisan (Nebraska) and top-two primary system (California and Washington) are excluded, as well as states that did not hold elections in 2020 (Alabama, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, and Virginia).

²⁴ Brandice Canes-Wrone, and Nathan Gibson, “Does Money Buy Congressional Love? Individual Donors and Legislative Voting.” *Congress & the Presidency* 46:1 (2019): 1–27.

²⁵ This map includes single-member district and multimember district contested general elections, combining contributions to candidates from both legislative chambers (Nebraska is excluded because it is unicameral).

For example, on average, women were about one-quarter of contributors in Arkansas; in contrast, the states most likely to see women contributors were Colorado and Connecticut. In these two states, women were almost at parity with men as a proportion of contributors.

If we compare women donors on the states depicted on the map with the presence of women state legislators, we learn that the top half of states in women's state legislative representation were more likely to have a higher share of women contributors (39%) than the states that are lower on women's state legislative representation (an average of 34%).²⁶ This relationship provides further support for the existence of a mutually beneficial relationship between women donors and women candidates.

If we examine the average contribution within each state by candidate party and donor gender, we find further evidence of gender inequality: the average contribution by women donors was almost always lower than the average amount contributed by men. This is the case if we look by state at contributions to Democratic and Republican general election candidates.

²⁶ Women's state legislative representation numbers are for 2021.

MEAN DONATION TO CANDIDATES BY PARTY AND DONOR GENDER

State	Democrats			Republicans		
	Women	Men	Ratio	Women	Men	Ratio
AK	\$106	\$129	0.82	\$194	\$215	0.90
AR	\$111	\$174	0.64	\$376	\$379	0.99
AZ	\$83	\$114	0.73	\$257	\$337	0.76
CO	\$78	\$109	0.72	\$113	\$140	0.80
CT	\$33	\$41	0.79	\$34	\$42	0.80
DE	\$135	\$171	0.79	\$198	\$232	0.85
FL	\$47	\$51	0.91	\$269	\$349	0.77
GA	\$160	\$266	0.60	\$524	\$581	0.90
HI	\$334	\$439	0.76	\$336	\$414	0.81
IA	\$33	\$41	0.82	\$133	\$295	0.45
ID	\$136	\$144	0.95	\$221	\$267	0.83
IL	\$538	\$812	0.66	\$549	\$907	0.61
IN	\$150	\$222	0.67	\$321	\$507	0.63
KS	\$71	\$80	0.88	\$206	\$251	0.82
KY	\$179	\$299	0.60	\$423	\$468	0.90
MA	\$146	\$207	0.70	\$127	\$169	0.75
ME	\$93	\$112	0.83	\$111	\$145	0.77
MI	\$21	\$26	0.82	\$185	\$223	0.83
MN	\$306	\$336	0.91	\$411	\$407	1.01
MO	\$112	\$164	0.68	\$254	\$282	0.90
MT	\$92	\$100	0.92	\$120	\$127	0.95
NC	\$180	\$220	0.82	\$509	\$733	0.69
ND	\$523	\$555	0.94	\$512	\$1,165	0.44
NH	\$136	\$144	0.94	\$160	\$205	0.78
NM	\$121	\$167	0.72	\$235	\$316	0.74
NV	\$178	\$322	0.55	\$364	\$560	0.65
NY	\$102	\$170	0.60	\$181	\$277	0.65
OH	\$78	\$111	0.70	\$386	\$511	0.76
OK	\$146	\$244	0.60	\$407	\$463	0.88
OR	\$251	\$288	0.87	\$369	\$786	0.47
PA	\$168	\$252	0.67	\$315	\$620	0.51
RI	\$114	\$199	0.57	\$209	\$186	1.12
SC	\$92	\$175	0.53	\$270	\$343	0.79
SD	\$179	\$180	0.99	\$271	\$309	0.88
TN	\$164	\$268	0.61	\$484	\$534	0.91
TX	\$195	\$769	0.25	\$570	\$962	0.59
UT	\$99	\$145	0.69	\$314	\$467	0.67
VT	\$255	\$293	0.87	\$472	\$338	1.40
WI	\$45	\$50	0.91	\$142	\$167	0.86
WV	\$90	\$265	0.34	\$299	\$421	0.71
WY	\$117	\$146	0.80	\$346	\$326	1.06

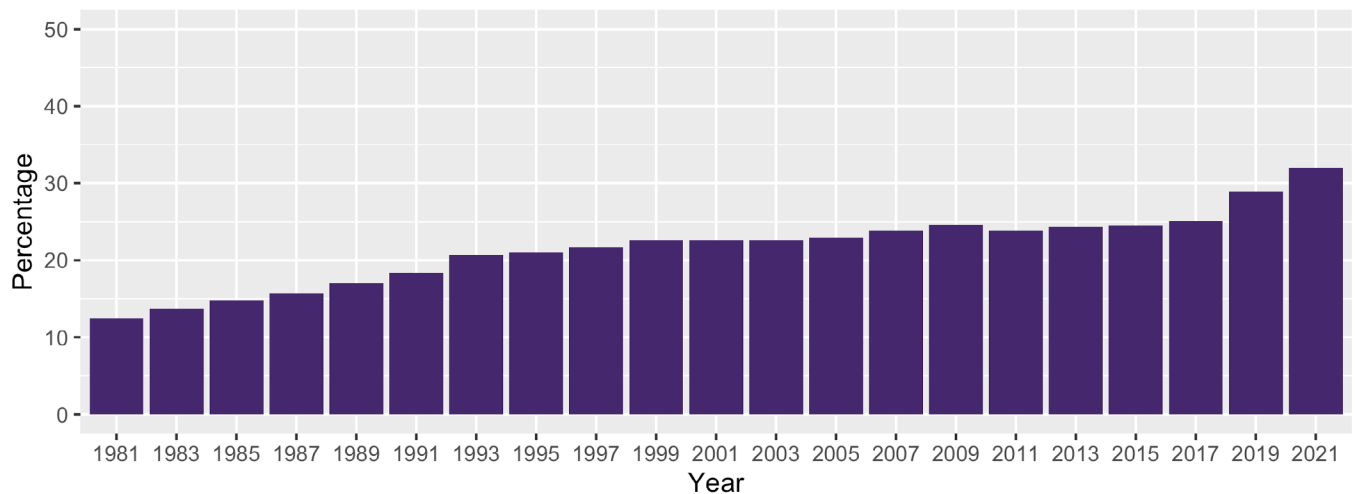
SOURCE: CAWP and OpenSecrets

NOTE: This table displays the mean donation by donor gender to state legislative candidates by state and candidate party. Only states with regularly scheduled elections are included. The donation amount varies by state with electoral competitiveness, campaign costs, reporting requirements, and contribution limits. The ratio column is the relationship of the mean donation for women to the mean donation for men.

STATE LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES' FUNDRAISING: CANDIDATE GENDER AND RACE/ETHNICITY

The proportion of women serving as state legislators has long fallen short of expectations. For example, in 1994, political scientists R. Darcy, Susan Welch, and Janet Clark predicted that women would be half of nonincumbent state legislative candidates years ago.²⁷ Party differences in recruitment and candidate support as well as racial barriers to candidacy and voting rights have limited the numbers of Republican women and women of color in the legislatures, dampening the numbers of women serving overall.²⁸ Women's state legislative representation hovered between 22% and 24% for two decades, until the 2018 election.

Percentage of Women in State Legislatures (1981-2021)



Data Source: CAWP

A review of CAWP's database on women candidates and officeholders reveals the significance of the 2018 election cycle. [Kelly Dittmar's analysis](#) found that the number of women nominees rose by 29% between 2016 and 2018 though the gains were largest for Democratic women: Democratic women gained almost 300 seats between 2018 and 2019; in contrast, the total number of Republican women serving declined by almost fifty.

The 2020 election cycle brought less dramatic changes but women's representation did increase somewhat as a result of the election. In [2020](#), women's state legislative representation rose slightly from 29.3% to 30.8%. According to Dittmar's analysis, Democratic women state legislators experienced a net gain of 43 seats and Republican women a net gain of 74 seats – a change from the dynamic of the 2018 election that favored Democratic women. As a result of the 2021 election, women's presence in the Nevada

²⁷ R. Darcy, Susan Welch, and Janet. Clark. *Women, Elections and Representation*. 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

²⁸ Kira Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run: Gender and Party in the American States*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Susan J. Carroll, and Kira Sanbonmatsu. *More Women Can Run: Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Carol Hardy-Fanta, Pei-te Lien, Diane M. Pinderhughes, and Christine M. Sierra. *Contested Transformation: Race, Gender, and Political Leadership in 21st Century America*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Laurel Elder 2021.

legislature rose to 60.3% and two additional states (Colorado and New Mexico) achieved a chamber that is majority women.

Most research about women's election to state legislative office has focused on such factors as success rates, parties, pathways to office, and the racial composition of districts.²⁹ Fewer studies have addressed campaign finance.³⁰ Those studies that have primarily sought to understand gender and campaign finance offer a mixed assessment of women's status as fundraisers, with some researchers finding a harder path for women's fundraising and the votes garnered with campaign receipts, with other studies finding evidence of gender parity.

For example, in an analysis of incumbent candidates in close contests, Michael Barber and his coauthors found evidence of both gender equality and gender inequality; they also found that men are more likely to give to men candidates.³¹ Jaclyn Kettler, as well, found gender-based giving patterns and some disadvantages for women in terms of money raised.³² Meanwhile, Shannon Jenkins found that more effort may be needed by women in order to yield the same receipts.³³

[CAWP's research](#) on attitudes toward fundraising revealed significant gender differences. Most women state legislators CAWP surveyed in 2008 perceived a harder path for women financially — an unexpected result given that the women we studied had successfully reached the legislature. As one state legislator observed in the CAWP report, "Guys are used to writing big checks and they have more male associates they can get that kind of money from."

Democratic women state legislators were more likely to perceive gender inequalities in fundraising than Republican women state legislators in the [CAWP report](#), with Democratic women of color more likely than their non-Hispanic white women colleagues to see gender-based inequalities. One state legislator

²⁹ Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Sanbonmatsu 2006; Becki Scola, "Women of Color in State Legislatures: Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Legislative Office Holding," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 28:3-4 (2007), 43-70. doi:10.1300/J501v28n03_03; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Paru Shah, Jamil Scott, and Eric Gonzalez Juenke, "Women of color candidates: examining emergence and success in state legislative elections," *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 7:2 (2019): 429-443; Rebecca Kreitzer and Tracy Osborn, "Women Candidate Recruitment Groups in the States," In *Good Reasons to Run: Women and Political Candidacy*, Eds. Shauna L. Shames, Rachel I. Bernhard, Mirya R. Holman, and Dawn Langan Teele (Temple University Press, 2020); Christian Dyogi Phillips, *Nowhere to Run: Race, Gender, and Immigration in American Elections* (New York: Oxford 2021).

³⁰ For exceptions see: Brian Werner, "Financing the Campaigns of Women Candidates and their Opponents: Evidence from Three States, 1982-1990," *Women & Politics* 19: 81-97 (1997); Robert E. Hogan, "The Effects of Candidate Gender on Campaign Spending in State Legislative Elections," *Social Science Quarterly* 88: (2007), 1092-1105; Timothy Werner and Kenneth R. Mayer, "Public Election Funding, Competition, and Candidate Gender," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 40 (2007), 661-667; Joel A. Thompson, Gary F. Moncrief, and Keith E. Hamm, "Gender, Candidate Attributes, and Campaign Contributions" in *Campaign Finance in State Legislative Elections*, ed. Joel A. Thompson and Gary F. Moncrief. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1998), 117-138.

³¹ Michael Barber, Daniel M. Butler, and Jessica Preece, "Gender Inequalities in Campaign Finance," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 11:2 (2016), 219-248.

³² Jaclyn J. Kettler, "Paying It Forward: Candidate contributions and support for diverse candidates," In *Good Reasons to Run: Women and Political Candidacy*. Eds. Mirya R Holman, Rachel Bernhard, Shauna Shames, and Dawn Teele (Temple University Press, 2020).

³³ Shannon Jenkins, "A Woman's Work is Never Done? Fund-raising Perception and Effort among Female State Legislative Candidates," *Political Research Quarterly* 60:2 (2007), 230-239.

remarked about the financial disadvantages Black women face: “I think a lot of it has to do with the areas we represent, the positions that we take. But that is [a] unique [obstacle] to African American women.”

In more recent interviews with women state legislators and activists conducted by political scientist Heather James, support from party gatekeepers and unequal access to donors were identified as challenges to increasing women’s state legislative presence.³⁴ James also found differences in fundraising success along the lines of race/ethnicity.

Throughout our analysis of fundraising, we disaggregate women candidates by race/ethnic identification. [Women of color](#) have lagged white women historically in politics including state legislative officeholding. In part, the constraints facing women of color candidates matter early in the process because of limited, favorable electoral opportunities.³⁵ And a growing body of evidence suggests that the intersection of gender and race puts women of color at a greater disadvantage in the money race.³⁶

If women candidates from historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups lack donor confidence about their viability, personal financial resources, and access to moneyed networks, they may be disadvantaged relative to white women.³⁷ Women of color candidates may also be more likely to run in less wealthy districts compared with white women candidates.

Receipts

Resources do not guarantee victory. But winning is associated with outraising one’s opponent. In our analysis of open-seat general election races for single-member districts, we examine contested races only; by definition, half of the candidates lose and half win. But the win rate for candidates who outraised their opponents was 74%, higher than the average win rate of 50%. Because the top fundraiser was more likely than other candidates to win, we can see that fundraising success is associated with winning.

³⁴ Heather James, *Still Running Backwards and in High Heels: Female Candidate Fundraising Process, Perception, and Challenges in the 50 States*, (Rutgers University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2019).

³⁵ In a comprehensive study of state legislative candidates from 1996 to 2015, Phillips (2021) found that Asian American women and Latina general election candidates were rare, with Latinas (0.9%) constituting and Asian American women constituting (0.3%) of all candidates. She also found that virtually all predominantly white state legislative districts were won by white candidates between 1996 and 2015.

³⁶ Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) found women of color were more likely to perceive a gender disadvantage in fundraising. Studies of congressional and statewide candidates find that women of color raise less than white women candidates. For more information see: *She Should Run, Vote with Your Purse: Lesson Learned; Women, Money, and Politics in the 2010 Election Cycle*, Report, (Washington, DC: She Should Run, 2012); Sanbonmatsu, Rogers, and Gothreau 2020; Sanbonmatsu and Gothreau 2021.

³⁷ Sarah Bryner and Grace Haley 2019; Ashley Sorensen, Philip Chen, “Identity in Campaign Finance and Elections: The Impact of Gender and Race on Money Raised in 2010–2018 U.S. House Elections”, *Political Research Quarterly* (2021). doi:10.1177/10659129211022846; Sarah Bryner, [Which women can run? The fundraising gap in the 2020 elections’ competitive primaries](#), OpenSecrets (2021).

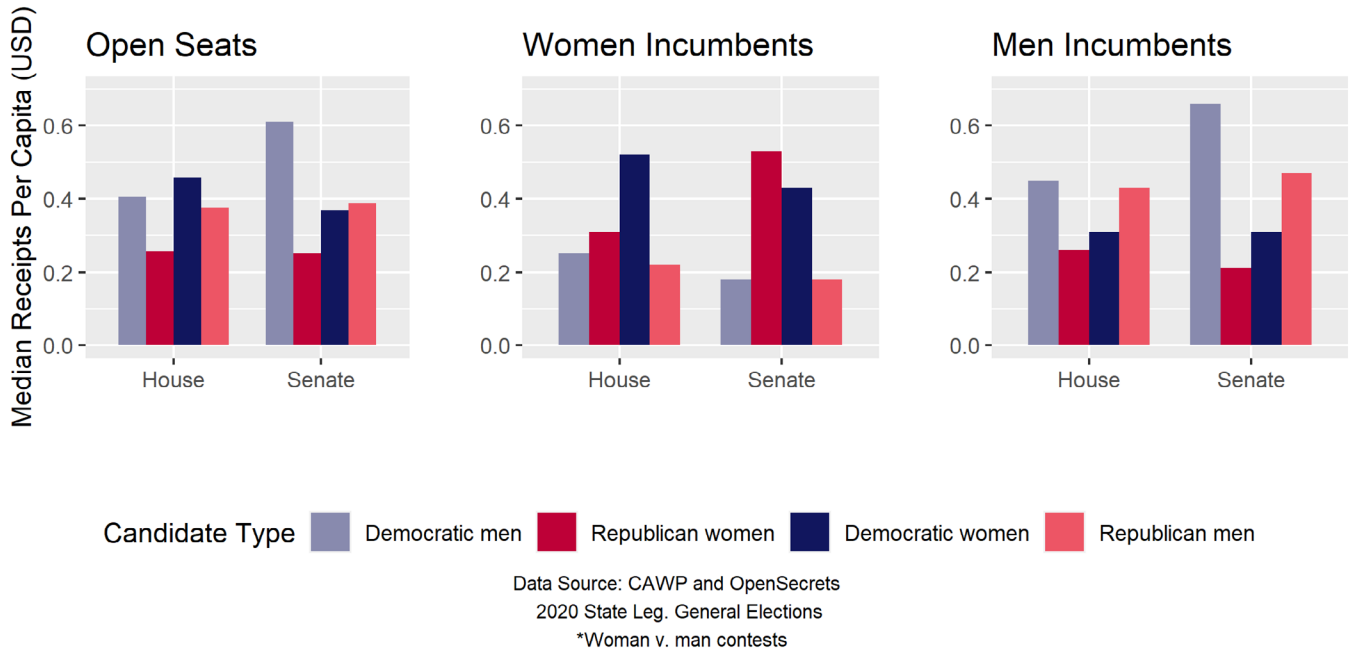
In the analyses that follow, we pay particular attention to contests for open seats; open-seat contests are most likely to yield a new legislator given how infrequently incumbents are defeated.³⁸ For example Ballotpedia found that fewer than 5% of incumbents lost their bids for reelection in 2020.³⁹ And in 2020, CAWP data show that more than four-fifths of newly elected women (or 389 out of 476) reached the legislature after winning open-seat contests, with the remainder winning as challengers against incumbents, confirming the importance of open-seat opportunities. We primarily focus on woman v. man contests in order to isolate the effect of candidate gender.

Looking at open-seat woman v. man general election contests, we learn that in state house races, Democratic women slightly outraised their Republican men opponents measured by median receipts per capita (\$.46 for Democratic women compared with \$.38 for Republican men) though the two groups of candidates fared about the same in state senate races (\$.37 for Democratic women compared with \$.39 for Republican men). (A value of \$1.00 per capita would mean that the candidate raised \$1.00 for each person residing in their district).

³⁸ The candidates from contested, single-member district races with contribution data from OpenSecrets most commonly ran in woman v. man races (N=2,466 candidates), followed by man v. man races (N=1,908), and woman v. woman races (N=642).

³⁹ [State legislative elections, 2020 - Ballotpedia](#)

Median Receipts by Candidate Type



Gender differences were larger in woman v. man open-seat contests featuring Republican women candidates. Republican women in state house and state senate open-seat races fell far behind their Democratic men opponents: In state house woman v. man races, Democratic men raised a median amount of \$.41 per capita from individual contributions compared with \$.26 for Republican women; in state senate races those statistics were \$.61 and \$.25 respectively. These statistics indicate that Republican women open-seat candidates in woman v. man races did not fare as well as Democratic women in similar contests — a finding confirmed in a multivariate analysis (see Appendix).⁴⁰

We can also consider how race/ethnicity and gender interact with respect to money raised in open-seat woman v. man contests. Women candidates in these contests were overwhelmingly white (77% of Democratic candidates and 82% of Republican candidates).⁴¹ Black women were the second largest group of candidates followed by Latinas, Asian American women, Middle Eastern/North African women, multiracial women, and Native American women. While our focus is on the fundraising statistics of general election candidates, it is worth noting that the underrepresentation of diverse candidates occurs early in the election process.

⁴⁰ If we also control for the Democratic share of the two-party vote in the previous state legislative election in the Republican model for open-seat contests, the confidence interval around the estimate for Republican men increases but the effect remains positive, indicating an advantage for men over women.

⁴¹ In woman v. woman open-seat contests, the percentages of white women as a share of candidates was similar (for 78% Democrats and 87% for Republicans).

RACIAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF WOMEN CANDIDATES IN OPEN-SEAT, WOMAN V. MAN CONTESTS

	Asian American	Black	Latina	MENA	Native American	Multiracial
Democrats	1%	14%	7%	1%	1%	1%
Republicans	8%	3%	8%	2%	0	2%

N=294

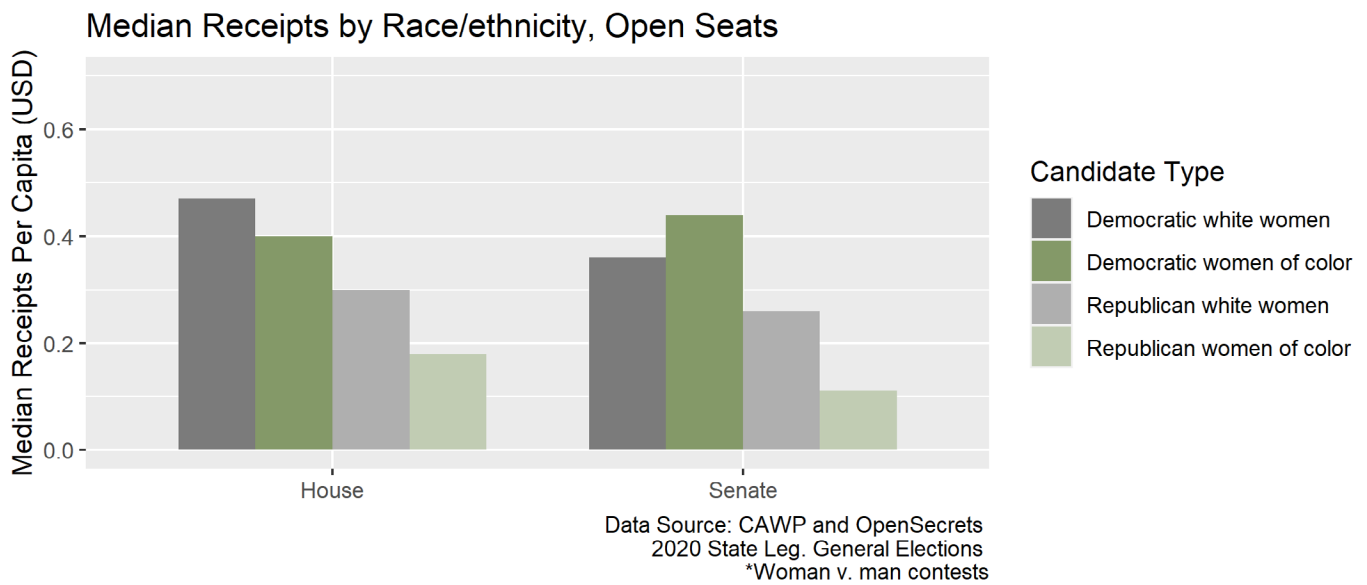
NOTE: Women may be included in more than one racial category. See Appendix for details about the race/ethnic categories. The multiracial category represents women who solely identify with the “multiracial” category.

White women Democratic state representative candidates outraised women of color Democratic state representative candidates in per capita receipts (\$.47 for white women compared with \$.40 for women of color), but the reverse was true for state senate candidates (\$.36 for white women compared with \$.44 for women of color). Thus, no clear pattern emerged for race/ethnicity and fundraising for Democratic women vying for open seats on this measure.⁴² The lack of a race/ethnicity effect is an indicator of the financial competitiveness of women of color candidates.

The small number of Republican women of color who sought open seats (with Democratic men opponents) fared worse than white Republican women. Whereas Republican white women state representative candidates raised \$.30 per capita in median receipts, that statistic is only \$.18 for the handful of Republican women of color running in similar races. Republican white women state senate candidates raised \$.26 per capita in median receipts compared with \$.11 for women of color. Republican women of color were running in districts that were more Democratic.⁴³

⁴² Multivariate analyses of these relationships, including controlling for the Democratic share of the two-party vote in the previous state legislative election, do not reveal a statistically significant relationship between women’s race/ethnic background and receipts in open-seat, woman v. man races. Because of the severe underrepresentation of women of color as state legislative candidates, we lack a sufficient N to disaggregate women by race/ethnic group in statistical analyses beyond differentiating women of color from white women.

⁴³ Of Republican women candidates in open-seat, woman v. man contests, the Democratic share of the two-party vote in the previous state legislative election was on average 56% for white women and 67% for women of color. Comparing women by party (regardless of race), we learn that the Democratic women running in open-seat woman v. man contests were running in more Democratic districts (with a Democratic share of the two-party vote in the previous state legislative election on average 55%) as were Republican women (an average of 58%).



But the pattern is slightly different for women incumbents facing men opponents. Democratic women of color seeking reelection trailed Democratic white women incumbent candidates in median per capita receipts for both state house and state senate races. Republican women of color seeking reelection raised more in terms of median receipts per capita than their Republican white women counterparts, but there were just six women of color candidates in this category. Women of color challengers seeking to defeat men incumbents fared similarly in the money race to white women, except in Democratic senate contests in which women of color challengers were not as well financed as Democratic white women challengers.⁴⁴

Democratic women usually fared better than Republican women in incumbent-challenger races. Regardless of gender, incumbents outraised their challenger opponents in median receipts per capita, as expected. However, Republican women state house incumbents appear to lack the financial advantage over their men challengers that Democratic women incumbents enjoyed over their men challengers. This finding is consistent with evidence throughout the report identifying areas of financial disadvantage for Republican women candidates.

Another way to assess how women fared as candidates is to calculate “monetary competitiveness,” or whether a candidate raised at least half of the amount raised by their opponent.⁴⁵ We conducted this analysis for open-seat woman v. man races.

By this metric of monetary competitiveness, we find that results depended on gender and party. While the monetary competitiveness statistics were similar for Democratic women and men in open-seat general election races (73% of Democratic women compared with 77% of Democratic men were monetarily

⁴⁴ Democratic women of color challenging Republican state senate incumbents raised \$.15 per capita compared with \$.37 for Democratic white women in similar races. Only 21 women of color ran as challengers against Republican men state senate incumbents, making a multivariate statistical analysis difficult.

⁴⁵ [Monetary Competitiveness in Gubernatorial Elections, 2001-2016 - FollowTheMoney.org](#)

competitive), there was a gender gap on the Republican side: only 45% of open-seat general election Republican women were monetarily competitive compared with 61% of Republican men. This difference is further evidence that Republican women candidates lag behind Democratic women candidates.

Overall, women of color and white women scored similarly in monetary competitiveness. But, echoing our analysis of median receipts per capita, Republican women of color candidates fared poorly compared with white Republican women. In open-seat woman v. man contests, about half of white Republican women were monetarily competitive compared with only one-quarter of Republican women of color. These findings about the scarcity of, and lack of support for, Republican women of color candidates is consistent with past research.⁴⁶

Self-financing

In open-seat general election woman v. man contests, except for one category of contests (contests with state house Republican women candidates with Democratic men opponents), a larger share of men's receipts came from self-financing than women's. Thus, women may face a more challenging fundraising environment because they do not personally fund their campaigns to the same extent as men. If we consider the share of candidates who contribute to their own campaigns, a higher proportion of men than women do so, within both parties. For example, 46% of Democratic men state house candidates in open-seat woman v. man contests contributed to their own campaigns compared with 38% of their Republican women opponents. Thirty-four percent of Democratic women state house candidates in open-seat woman v. man contests contributed to their own campaigns compared with 53% of their Republican men opponents.

Eighteen percent of funds raised by Republican men who sought state house seats came from self-financing compared with 4% for their Democratic women opponents; the comparable statistic for Democratic men was 6% compared with 11% for Republican women. Republican men state senate candidates raised 11% from self-financing compared with 4% for their Democratic women opponents. Thirty-percent of Democratic state senate men candidate funds were from self-financing compared with only 7% for their Republican women opponents. More often than not, the same pattern exists when we examine incumbent-challenger races.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Bernard L. Fraga, Paru Shah, and Eric Gonzalez Juenke, "Did Women and Candidates of Color Lead or Ride the Democratic Wave in 2018?" *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 53:3 (2021), 435-439. doi:10.1017/S1049096520000268; Phillips 2021.

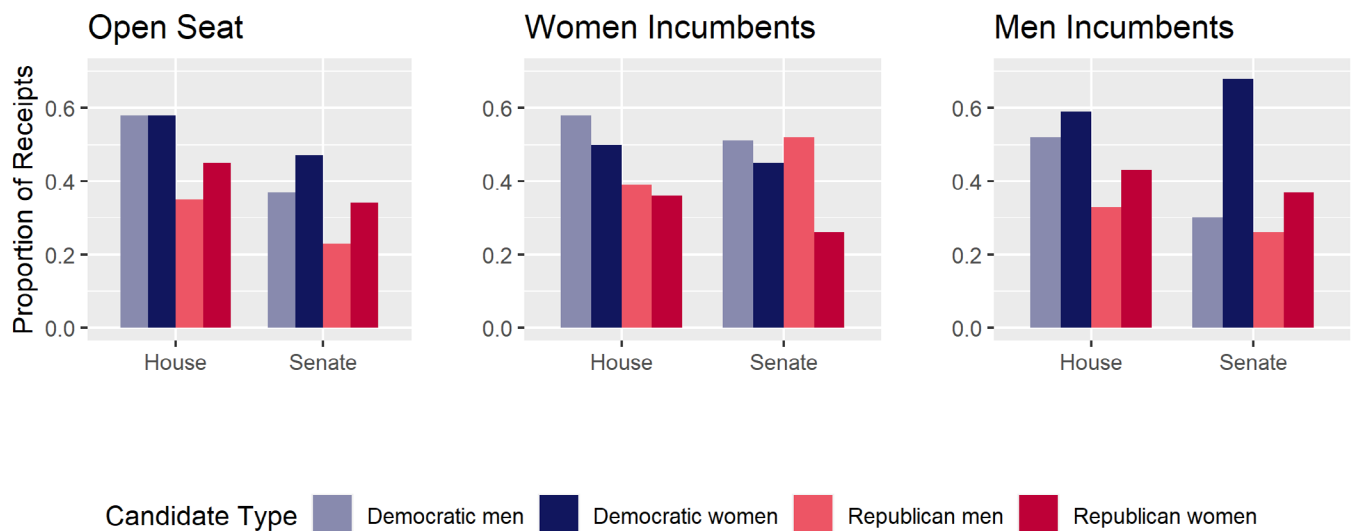
⁴⁷ For example, 2% of Democratic women incumbent state house candidate funds were from self-financing compared with 12% for their Republican men challengers. Republican women incumbent state house candidates raised 6% of their funds from self-financing compared with 7% for their Democratic men challengers. The same relationship with greater self-financing for men holds for state senate races with incumbents. However, men state house incumbents who were men raised a smaller share of their funds from self-financing than their women challengers. Another way to define self-financing is to determine the percentage of candidates who provided the majority of their own funds. Very few state legislative candidates in our study of single-member district elections meet this definition: only 3% of women candidates and 6% of men candidates are primarily funded with these contributions.

No clear pattern emerged with respect to women candidates' race/ethnicity and the proportion of funds raised from self-financing in woman v. man open-seat contests. A larger share of white women state senate candidates of both parties contributed to their own campaigns than did women of color state senate candidates; the reverse was true for Democratic state house candidates though the difference by race/ethnicity was smaller. A larger share of Republican white women state house candidates' receipts came from self-financing than those of Republican women of color state house candidates.

Small Contributions

In almost all cases, compared with their Republican men opponents, Democratic women raised a larger share of their contributions through smaller denominations (contributions of \$200 or less). For example, in open-seat woman v. man general elections, Democratic women state house candidates raised 58% of their funds from small contributions compared with 35% for their Republican men opponents.

Proportion of Receipts from Small Contributions



Data Source: CAWP and OpenSecrets
 2020 State Leg. General Elections
 *Woman v. man contests

The relationship between candidate gender and small contributions is less clear for contests featuring Republican women with Democratic men opponents. Republican women usually raised less of their funds from small contributions than their Democratic men opponents, although the difference between the two groups was usually smaller than the gap between Democratic women and their Republican men opponents.

In open-seat woman v. man contests as well as races featuring women incumbents and men challengers, white women were somewhat more likely to raise money from small contributors than women of color. However, women of color challengers seeking to defeat men incumbents raised more from small contributions than white women who challenged men incumbents.

Out-of-State Contributions

Women’s donor networks and PACs have successfully tapped donors across state lines to elect more women to office. Examining open-seat woman v. man contests, we see that party is a better predictor than gender of the share of contributions from outside the state.⁴⁸ For example, 18% of Democratic women running for state house reported contributions from outside their state compared with 8% of Republican men in those contests; and 21% of Democratic men’s contributions were from outside their state compared with 8% for Republican women.⁴⁹

MEAN SHARE OF OUT-OF-STATE CONTRIBUTIONS

	Candidate Gender	Out-of-state (proportion)
State House		
Democratic candidates	Women	18%
	Men	21%
Republican candidates	Women	8%
	Men	8%
State Senate		
Democratic candidates	Women	18%
	Men	15%
Republican candidates	Women	11%
	Men	7%

SOURCE: CAWP, OpenSecrets

NOTE: Open-seat, woman v. man contests.

⁴⁸ Hawaii restricts the proportion of funds that can be contributed by nonresidents: <https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/Elections/Contribution-Limits-to-Candidates-2019-2020.pdf?ver=2019-10-02-132802-117>

⁴⁹ We do not find any clear differences by race/ethnicity for women candidates in share of out-of-state contributions in woman v. man open-seat contests.

Cross-State Campaign Receipts

It is worth noting that running for the legislature entails different levels of resources depending on the state. This is evident in our table of the median total amount raised for all open-seat general election contests for single-member districts. Campaign finance laws regulating public financing of elections and limits on contributions create variation in how funds are raised, and how much is raised.⁵⁰

MEDIAN AMOUNT RAISED IN STATE HOUSE OPEN-SEAT CONTESTS

State	Chamber	Democratic	Republican
AK	House	\$13,874	\$21,603
AR	House	\$24,295	\$21,321
CO	House	\$30,137	\$17,652
CT	House	\$6,205	\$6,548
DE	House	\$51,905	\$6,210
FL	House	\$50,427	\$74,932
GA	House	\$6,094	\$49,924
HI	House	\$29,774	\$8,321
IA	House	\$80,540	\$12,924
ID	House	\$6,430	\$14,415
IL	House	\$23,172	\$22,305
IN	House	\$14,024	\$15,423
KS	House	\$30,039	\$17,890
KY	House	\$15,424	\$32,745
MA	House	\$31,075	\$19,072
ME	House	\$1,000	\$977
MI	House	\$25,671	\$46,141
MN	House	\$28,356	\$7,944
MO	House	\$10,696	\$18,759
MT	House	\$9,867	\$5,704
NC	House	\$22,150	\$47,890
NM	House	\$51,645	\$31,635
NV	House	\$17,634	\$8,477
NY	House	\$49,397	\$29,553
OH	House	\$23,393	\$43,060
OK	House	\$30,010	\$34,140
OR	House	\$27,183	\$8,751
PA	House	\$108,032	\$20,425
RI	House	\$22,756	\$2,182
SC	House	\$41,718	\$29,603
TN	House	\$138,027	\$194,360
UT	House	\$20,282	\$6,935
WI	House	\$25,632	\$21,720
WY	House	\$5,194	\$6,132

SOURCE: CAWP and OpenSecrets

NOTE: Median amount raised in open-seat single-member district contests (regardless of the gender of the candidates).

⁵⁰ See the CFI database of campaign finance laws: https://cfinst.github.io/#contribution-limits?question=IndividualToCandLimit_H_Max&year=2018

MEDIAN AMOUNT RAISED IN STATE HOUSE OPEN-SEAT CONTESTS

State	Chamber	Democratic	Republican
AK	Senate	\$40,034	\$63,753
AR	Senate	\$143,645	\$13,775
AZ	Senate	\$22,480	\$24,670
CO	Senate	\$34,791	\$38,465
CT	Senate	\$91,282	\$17,640
DE	Senate	\$146,016	\$7,206
FL	Senate	\$89,416	\$138,801
GA	Senate	\$31,690	\$135,158
HI	Senate	\$269,171	\$8,597
IA	Senate	\$76,085	\$36,146
ID	Senate	\$24,002	\$20,251
IL	Senate	\$93,386	\$45,829
KS	Senate	\$136,787	\$50,207
KY	Senate	\$17,988	\$28,720
MA	Senate	\$413,092	\$389,741
MN	Senate	\$56,226	\$35,340
MO	Senate	\$28,286	\$60,384
MT	Senate	\$17,919	\$3,116
NC	Senate	\$22,256	\$65,398
ND	Senate	\$16,239	\$25,262
NH	Senate	\$101,258	\$12,217
NM	Senate	\$161,504	\$57,712
NV	Senate	\$39,839	\$61,886
NY	Senate	\$212,970	\$61,644
OH	Senate	\$287,239	\$199,116
OK	Senate	\$26,064	\$148,578
OR	Senate	\$56,610	\$59,071
PA	Senate	\$65,808	\$23,155
RI	Senate	\$21,794	\$16,590
SC	Senate	\$35,162	\$37,410
SD	Senate	\$4,348	\$8,515
TN	Senate	\$24,090	\$130,284
TX	Senate	\$197,628	\$86,058
UT	Senate	\$24,922	\$88,391
WI	Senate	\$67,527	\$98,201
WY	Senate	\$10,130	\$7,982

SOURCE: CAWP and OpenSecrets

NOTE: Median amount raised in open-seat, single-member district contests (regardless of the gender of the candidates).

The tables reveal that the median amount raised from individual donors in open-seat races varied greatly in the 2020 election by state, chamber, and party.

Another way to analyze these data is to calculate the median amount raised in the state for open-seat races regardless of chamber and party. If we compare women's state legislative officeholding with this measure of amount raised by state, we learn that the amount raised by open-seat candidates in the top half of states for women's state legislative representation (\$28,600) is lower than other states (\$39,600). In other words, open-seat candidates raised less in states with more women in the state legislatures. This negative relationship may indicate that women are more likely to run for and hold office in states with lower campaign costs, although more research is needed to parse out this relationship.

CONCLUSION

Women are better represented as state legislators than as governors or members of Congress. But they have not achieved parity. In the most recent election cycle, women's gains in state legislative seats were negligible. In this report, we contribute to the debate about women's officeholding with an analysis of campaign finance.

For the most part, women candidates fare similarly in fundraising across race/ethnic differences. This finding is encouraging news for those seeking to recruit and elect more women of color to the legislatures. However, we saw some evidence of inequality for Democratic women incumbent candidates and for the limited number of women of color who ran as Republicans.

One of the most significant challenges facing women of color candidates is running for and winning the nomination: only about one-fifth of women candidates competing in open-seat woman v. man contests were women of color. Recruitment and support of women of color candidates at all stages of the process – including fundraising – are needed to diversify state legislatures.⁵¹

Democratic women candidates fare well overall in the money race, though the structure of their campaign receipts may indicate that they have a more difficult fundraising path. Meanwhile, Republican women are not as competitive with respect to fundraising as Democratic women. These challenges may help explain why women are much better represented as Democratic than Republican state legislators.

Men out-gave women as a share of contributors and in terms of total money contributed. But in some respects – particularly women who contribute to Democratic women candidates – women donors are at parity. This means that, to the extent that giving yields more voice in American politics, Democratic women candidates are more likely than other candidates to hear from women voters. However, women are still significantly underrepresented as donors to Republican campaigns, even in races that feature at least one woman candidate.

The giving gender gap is surprising given that women out-vote men and that other gender gaps in participation have narrowed or closed over time. In part, these differences reflect the persistence of structural inequalities based on gender as well as race/ethnicity and class.

⁵¹ Fraga, Shah, and Juenke 2021; Phillips 2021.

Political activists and the political parties could mobilize women donors to a much greater extent, beyond the gender affinity effect observed with Democratic women candidates. After all, women are accustomed to giving to charity and have made great strides in narrowing the wage gap.⁵² Making contributions is yet to be included in women's political activities to the same extent it is in men's; women's voices are less likely to be heard in state politics as a result.

⁵² Tessa Skidmore and Charles Sellen, "Giving while female: Women are more likely to donate to charities than men of equal means," *The Conversation* (February 25, 2021); <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/30/womens-lead-in-skills-and-education-is-helping-narrow-the-gender-wage-gap/>

APPENDIX

DATA SOURCES AND CODING

CANDIDATE RACE/ETHNICITY

We rely on CAWP's data on women candidates' race/ethnicity for almost all cases. For women candidates who were not in CAWP's database but ran in 2018, we relied on the race/ethnicity codes from the Bernard Fraga et al. dataset.⁵³ For the remaining candidates, we sought information from the candidate's website for accurate information about how candidates present themselves with respect to racial background in their written biographical statements. If we could not rely on their biographical statements, we turned to news accounts and other online sources for candidate information. If no racial information was found, we assumed that the candidates are non-Hispanic white because self-identified non-Hispanic white candidates rarely explicitly identify as such in their biographies. For this reason, it is possible that this methodology underrepresents candidates of color.

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

- Initial data on candidates (gender verified by CAWP), campaign donations, and vote totals are provided by [OpenSecrets](#).
- We include unitemized contributions in our report. (Unitemized contributions are those made under a state's donor disclosure threshold. The threshold varies dramatically among the 50 states, as seen in the [Campaign Finance Institute's database](#) of campaign finance laws.)
- Because unitemized contributions can be reported as a lump sum, our measure of total number of contributors relies on an estimate of the number of contributors behind total unitemized contributions.
- We include all contributions in the cycle (e.g., for most offices, the previous 2 years) to measure general election contributions.

DONOR GENDER

We rely on OpenSecrets' estimates of donor gender in this report. To estimate donor gender, OpenSecrets matches the donors in its database with information from the Gender API <<https://gender-api.com/>>.

⁵³ Bernard L. Fraga, Eric Gonzalez Juenke, and Paru Shah, Paru, 2021, "Candidate Characteristics Cooperative (C3) 2018 Data", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VHAPHV>, Harvard Dataverse, V2, UNF:6:xlhBPOhz4ljhD/x3KsR4rw== [fileUNF]

Gender API uses an algorithm to categorize names using its database of governmental and social networking records; its U.S. database includes nearly 700,000 names. The average confidence interval for the donor gender estimates is 97% for the OpenSecrets contributions analyzed in this report.

VOTE SHARE

Vote share data was provided by OpenSecrets. We use vote share in the multivariate models that appear in the Appendix.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

We estimated a multilevel model for mixed-gender general election races, separately by party. We estimate separate models for open-seat races and incumbent-challenger races. We include the following control variables: the Democratic candidate's vote share in the state in the previous presidential election; the district population; the chamber; the log of the opponent's total contributions; whether the state has term limits;⁵⁴ and the degree of legislative professionalism.⁵⁵ In the incumbent-challenger models, we control for incumbency. The dependent variable is the log of total contributions (current US\$).

⁵⁴ Term limits information is from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL): <https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/chart-of-term-limits-states.aspx>

⁵⁵ Legislative professionalism is measured on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 indicating a more part-time legislature and 5 indicating a more full-time legislature, from NCSL: [Full- and Part-Time Legislatures \(ncsl.org\)](https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/full-and-part-time-legislatures.aspx)

DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES - OPEN-SEAT CONTESTS, WOMAN V. MAN

Dependent variable: log of total donations

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Candidate gender (man)	.08	.22
Opponent donations (log)	-.03	.07
District population (log)	.29	.26
Chamber (senate)	.64	.33
State legislative professionalism	.36	.24
Term limits	-.95	.35
Democratic share of pres. vote (state)	-1.14	2.16
Intercept	6.60	2.59

Random effects (31 groups) Std. Dev.
 State .70
 Residual 1.31
 AIC=872.8, DIC=836.4
 Deviance=844.6

N=243

REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES - OPEN-SEAT CONTESTS, WOMAN V. MAN

Dependent variable: log of total donations

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Candidate gender (man)	.42	.22
Opponent donations (log)	-.01	.06
District population (log)	.73	.21
Chamber (senate)	.41	.30
State legislative professionalism	.22	.19
Term limits	-.62	.27
Democratic share of pres. vote (state)	-5.01	1.67
Intercept	3.09	2.13

Random effects (31 groups) Std. Dev.
 State .42
 Residual 1.33
 AIC=866.7, DIC=824.4
 Deviance=835.6

N=243

DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES - INCUMBENT-CHALLENGER CONTESTS, WOMAN V. MAN

Dependent variable: log of total donations

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Candidate gender (man)	-.16	.12
Incumbent	.85	.11
Opponent donations (log)	.33	.04
District population (log)	.35	.14
Chamber (senate)	.24	.19
State legislative professionalism	.27	.13
Term limits	-.40	.20
Democratic share of pres. vote (state)	-1.64	1.23
Intercept	2.45	1.43

Random effects (32 groups) Std. Dev.
 State .38
 Residual 1.38
 AIC=2784.6, DIC=2722.5
 Deviance=2742.6

N=782

REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES - INCUMBENT-CHALLENGER CONTESTS, WOMAN V. MAN

Dependent variable: log of total donations

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Candidate gender (man)	-.16	.11
Incumbent	1.07	.10
Opponent donations (log)	.30	.03
District population (log)	.48	.13
Chamber (senate)	.04	.17
State legislative professionalism	.06	.11
Term limits	-.32	.17
Democratic share of pres. vote (state)	.93	1.04
Intercept	.36	1.25

Random effects (32 groups) Std. Dev.
 State .29
 Residual 1.31
 AIC=2699.4, DIC=2632.5
 Deviance=2654.9

N=782