

Women on the Ballot? Investigating Gendered Perceptions of the Emotional Viability of Women to Serve in Politics since 1974*

Inessa De Angelis

November 7, 2023

At current rates, the World Economic Forum estimates that it will take at least 100 years to reach gender parity in politics. Utilizing data from The General Social Survey (GSS), this paper analyzes responses between 1974 and 2022 to begin to understand how demographic factors, political views, and party identification impact perceptions of the emotional viability of women to serve in politics. This paper reveals that despite gendered media framing and other previously identified barriers, female politicians are largely perceived by people across a variety of political views and party identifications as having suitable emotional capabilities to hold elected office.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Perceptions of Women in Politics	3
3	Data and Methods	4
3.1	Survey Methodology and Data Limitations	5
3.1.1	“No Answer” and “Don’t Know” Responses	6
3.2	Data Cleaning and Preparations	7
3.2.1	Respondent Demographic Information	7
3.2.2	Perceptions of Women in Politics	7
3.2.3	Political Preferences	8

*Code and data are available at: https://github.com/InessaDeAngelis/Perceptions_of_Women_in_Politics

3.3	Data Descriptions	8
3.3.1	Respondent Demographics	8
3.3.2	Political Views	9
3.3.3	Party Identification	11
4	Results	12
4.1	Political Views	12
4.2	Party Identification	15
5	Discussion	17
5.1	Perceptions of Women in Politics by Political Views	17
5.1.1	Perceptions of Women in Politics - Moderates versus Liberals and Con- servatives	17
5.2	Perceptions of Women in Politics by Party Identification	19
5.3	Limitations	21
6	Conclusion	22
	References	23

1 Introduction

Despite changing norms and perceptions, women are largely still missing from elected office in the United States (U.S.) and across the world. In 2023, the U.S. elected a historic number of women to the House of Representatives with 125 (or 29%) and 25 to the Senate (or 25%) (American Women and Politics 2023). The current Vice President, Kamala Harris, is the first woman to hold this office. Although the number of women elected to the highest levels of government in the U.S. is moving toward gender-parity, progress is slow. Women’s credibility and perceived power as politicians is impacted by gendered framing by traditional media, priming members of the public to hold biased views about their qualifications (de Geus et al. 2021). Framing refers to how information is chosen, interpreted, and presented by the media, influencing the audience’s perception of it as important and shaping their own decision making procedures (Bashevkin 2009). Although it has not yet happened, previous research has shown that the public is open to voting for a female president and that gender stereotypes perpetuated by the media are playing less of a role in the construction of public image and voting behaviors (Holman 2023). However, gender stereotypes continue to influence public perceptions of women in politics.

To gain a further understanding of the impact of gender stereotypes and the perceived emotional viability of women to serve in politics, I examine responses by political views and party identification, using data obtained from the U.S. General Statistical Survey (GSS) from NORC (NORC 2022b) at the University of Chicago. These perceptions of women in politics are then analyzed and modeled using logistic regression to understand their associations

with demographic factors such as gender, as well as tracking the perceptions over time. It is hypothesized that respondents with more liberal political views and Democrat party identifications will disagree that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women and that respondents with more conservative political views and Republican party identifications will agree that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women.

My analysis emphasizes that perceptions of women in politics have generally become more positive over time since the early 1970s, with a small dip in the late 1990s, 2006, and 2016. People who self-identify as Democrats or as having liberal political views in most cases disagree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, while people who self-identify as Republicans or as having conservative political views in some cases agree with the premise. The number of people with conservative views who agree that men are emotionally better suited for politics is not as high as anticipated, while people with Moderate political views and Other party identifications hold unexpected views about women in politics. My findings generally reinforce our understanding of the political divide on questions about the role of women in politics.

In the remainder of this paper, I commence with the [Perceptions of Women in Politics](#) section which provides an overview of previous research and gaps, then in the [Data and methods](#) section I outline the nature of the data obtained, limitations, and cleaning procedures. In the [Results](#) section, I present my statistical models and trends found during the analysis process. Then, in the [Discussion](#) section, I provide further insights and future areas of study. Lastly, in the [Conclusion](#), I summarize the main findings.

2 Perceptions of Women in Politics

Research analyzing public attitudes and biases toward women in politics in the U.S. and other democratic nations has many research precedents (Dolan 2014; Holman 2023). The traditional media, through mechanisms like framing and priming, focus on how issues are presented and the structural bias they uphold (McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver 1997). Specifically, “... the ways public problems are formulated for the media audience” continue to play a significant role in the portrayal of women in politics (McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver 1997, 7). Research published by Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) highlights how media framing of politics as a “masculine” sphere reinforces that women are not qualified or welcome, threatening the existence of current and future female politicians. Aaldering and Van Der Pas (2020) suggest that voters and scholars alike need to cease evaluating female politicians on the basis of gendered, male politician stereotypes perpetuated by the media and instead offer evaluations on the basis of actual leadership skills.

Public opinion polling analyzed by Dolan and Hansen (2018) reveals that while the public is aware of barriers facing women running for office, whether it be limited childcare or party fundraising structures, there is limited interest in working to remove these barriers. Dolan and Lynch (2015) go beyond the growing body of research into public perceptions and attitudes

to understand voter behavior and decision making procedures when voters have the choice of women on the ballot. Their research reveals that there is a relationship, albeit not significant, between public attitudes towards women in politics and actually casting their ballot for female candidates (Dolan and Lynch 2015).

Furthermore, previous research has focused on the gendered and partisan nature of women in politics, with women traditionally having more liberal political views and Democrat party identifications, with men having more conservative political views and Republican party identifications (Barnes and Cassese 2017). However, moderate voters and people affiliated with “Other” political parties continue to be understudied in American politics, especially surrounding their views on issues such as the role of women in politics (Davis 2020; Fowler et al. 2023). Voters with moderate views, as illustrated by Davis (2020), are conventionally understood as having moderate left-leaning or right-leaning views, not necessarily centrist, “middle of the road” views, as proposed by Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner (2012).

The historical and contemporary availability of GSS data means it is often drawn on for measuring public attitudes toward various social, economic, and political issues, including evaluating perceptions of women in politics. Recently, scholars employ GSS data as a way to augment other national or specific research-creation survey data, often focusing on answers to demographic or economic questions. Welch and Sigelman (1982) used GSS data from the first three years the women in politics question was asked to determine which demographic factors were most predisposed to supporting women in politics, while Diekman, Eagly, and Kulesa (2002) reveal systematic bias and gender stereotypes lead to discrepancies when men were asked to reveal their more favorable positions on “female-stereotypical” policy positions. Jennings (2006) utilized GSS data to perform a longitudinal, cross-generational analysis of the “gender gap”, focusing on the dynamics of generational change and corresponding political views. However, no recent research has solely examined GSS data between the commencement of respondents being asked the women in the politics question in the 1970s and the most recent iteration of the survey in 2022. In particular, this paper fills existing gaps by solely employing GSS data to see how responses by gender, age, political views, and party identification vary over the span of nearly fifty years, while placing emphasis on the responses of Moderates and people affiliated with “Other” political parties.

3 Data and Methods

The data used in this paper was retrieved from the US General Social Survey (GSS) from NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC 2022b). I retrieved both demographic data and data relating to the perceived emotional viability of women in politics, political party affiliation and identification, from 1974 to 2022.

For demographic data, I acquired responses for the variables `age` and `sex` which provide insight into respondents’ age and gender. I then obtained data relating to the emotional viability of women in serve in politics, encompassed in the variables `fepol`, `fepolv`, and `fepolv`. The

survey question for all three variables asks *“Tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women”* (NORC 2022a). Going forward, I will refer to this as the “women in politics question”.

I additionally retrieved data for the variables `polviews` (political views) and `partyid` (party identification). The political views survey question asks *“We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I’m going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal–point 1–to extremely conservative–point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?”* (NORC 2022a). The party identification survey question asks *“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?”* (NORC 2022a).

3.1 Survey Methodology and Data Limitations

Since 1972, GSS has administered in-person interviews to track public opinion. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, data from the year 2020 was not recorded and instead spans the years of 2020 and 2021. This data was collected using new and updated methodologies, which changed which people were selected and how they completed the GSS questionnaire.

The 2022 GSS bridges the methodology from both the traditional face-to-face data collection processes utilized between 1972 and 2018 and the web-based collection method introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, using a mixed mode that includes face-to-face, web, and telephone surveys. Throughout 2022, the GSS conducted an experiment where the sample was divided into two parts. The first part encompassed people doing the face-to-face survey, while the second part included people doing the web and telephone survey. The content of the two parts of the data was not intended to be compared, instead comparing the two modes of collecting data. The sample divided in two for the purpose of comparing methodologies is visible in the `fepolv` and `fepolnv` variables selected for this paper. In 2021 and 2022, the GSS survey updated the variable name from `fepol` to `fepolv` and `fepolnv`, although the phrasing of the question remained the same. Despite these changes in methodology, GSS (NORC 2022a) intends for the 2022 survey to be comparable to the 2018 GSS. Although the majority of the data utilized for this study was obtained prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2021 and 2022 responses may be impacted by the changes in methodology.

Previous iterations of GSS selected respondents by quota (1972-1976), Kish grid with age ordering (1975-2018), and last birthday (2021). The 2022 GSS shifts to a Kish grid without age ordering, where adults in the household are selected by their order in the household, not age (NORC 2022a). These changes to the selection of respondents, especially considering technological literacy among older populations may impact the survey results from 2021 and 2022.

3.1.1 “No Answer” and “Don’t Know” Responses

When moving from an in-person interviewing process to web and mixed-method interviews, GSS shifted their approach to how to code uncertainty, indecision, or a refusal to answer from respondents. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, if a respondent opted not to answer a question, interviewers coded it as “No Answer” or “Don’t Know”. However, with the web-based survey in 2021, there was no interviewer to determine how to code a respondent’s non-response. Instead of “No Answer” or “Don’t Know”, users could skip the question. “Skipped on web” indicates that users read a question but skipped it. “Skipped on web” responses are separated from “No Answer” which continues to be employed for the face-to-face and phone surveys (NORC 2022a).

The women in politics survey question continues to have a high “No Answer” rate, with 82% of survey respondents opting not to respond. Figure 1 illustrates years in which the women in politics survey question was not asked (solely shown as “NA” or omitted) and years in which it was asked, separated into the three possible answers of “Agree”, “Disagree”, and “NA”. Previous research suggests that social desirability bias impacts respondents’ willingness to reveal their true beliefs about social issues such as the role of women in politics (Holman 2023), which is an identified limitation of this survey and is likely affecting the number of responses garnered (further discussed in [Limitations](#)).

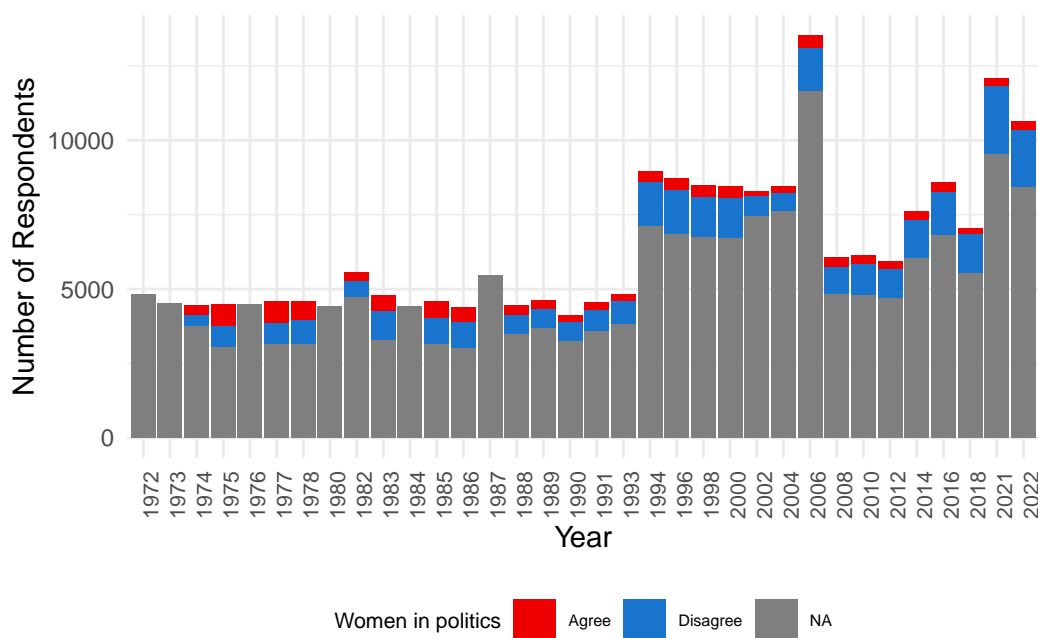


Figure 1: Distribution of “No Answer” responses to the Women in Politics Question by year

3.2 Data Cleaning and Preparations

Data was collected, cleaned, and analyzed using the statistical programming software R (R Core Team 2023), using functions from `tidyverse` (Wickham et al. 2019), `ggplot2` (Wickham 2016), `dplyr` (Wickham et al. 2023), `janitor` (Firke 2023), `KableExtra` (Zhu 2021), `knitr` (Xie 2014), `labelled` (Larmarange et al. 2023), `haven` (Wickham, Miller, and Smith 2022), `Formattable` (Ren and Russell 2021), and `here` (Müller and Bryan 2020).

After downloading and selecting the variables of interest from GSS (NORC 2022b), I performed data cleaning based on the variable definitions outlined in the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a). I removed the years in which the questions asking whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, political views, and party identification were not asked (the raw data set would display answers for those years as NA). I updated the respondent demographic information data set to reflect the years omitted, given that these demographic questions are asked annually.

The political views and party identification questions were asked slightly more frequently between 1974 and 1994, including in some years that the women in politics question was not. The responses from 1976, 1980, 1984, and 1987 were removed to ensure consistency between the two data sets. Similar to the women in politics question, the party identification and political views were asked bi-annually starting in 1994, except in 2020 due to Covid-19.

3.2.1 Respondent Demographic Information

During face-to-face interviews, interviewers traditionally coded the `sex` variable based on their observations. However, it was not possible to make this determination with telephone and web administered surveys, so respondents were asked their sex recorded at birth and their current gender identity. GSS then re-coded these responses into one variable: `sex`.

During the data cleaning process, I renamed the `sex` column to `gender`, with value 1 updated to “Male”, and value 2 updated to “Female” based on the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a). There were no changes in how respondents were asked to provide their age.

3.2.2 Perceptions of Women in Politics

Between 1974 and 2018, the variable for the women in politics question was `fepol`. However, with the implementation of the online only survey in 2021 and the mixed-methodology survey in 2022, `fepolv` and `fepolnv` were introduced to replace `fepol`. Consequently, employing the `rbind()` function which combines groups of rows together, I merged together the `fepol`, `fepolv`, and `fepolnv` responses into one new variable labelled `women_in_politics`. During the data cleaning process, I update value 1 to “Agree”, and value 2 to “Disagree” based on the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a)

There appears to be no pattern or clear methodology behind why the women in politics question was asked some years over others, as sometimes the question was asked two or three years in a row, then not asked in a subsequent year, before repeating the sequence. Starting in 1994, the women in politics question was asked bi-annually, except in 2020 due to Covid-19 impacting the surveying process.

3.2.3 Political Preferences

During the data cleaning process, I renamed the `polviews` column to `political_views`, with the value 1 updated to “Extremely liberal”, 2 updated to “Liberal”, 3 updated to “Slightly liberal,” 4 updated to “Moderate”, 5 updated to “Slightly conservative”, 6 updated to “Conservative”, and 7 to “Extremely conservative” based on the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a).

Furthermore, during the data cleaning process I renamed the `partyid` column to `party_identification`. I then changed value 0 to “Strong Democrat”, 1 to “Not Strong Democrat”, 2 to “Independent, Close to Democrat”, 3 to “Independent”, 4 to “Independent, Close to Republican”, 5 to “Not Strong Republican”, 6 to “Strong Republican”, and 7 to “Other”, based on the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a).

3.3 Data Descriptions

3.3.1 Respondent Demographics

Between 1974 and 2022, 37,005 responses were recorded for GSS surveys which specifically asked the women in politics, political views, and party identification questions. Of these respondents, 20,609 (56%) identified as female, with 16,346 (44%) identifying as male, and 50 (0.1%) opting not to share their **gender**. Respondents largely disagreed that men are better emotionally suited than women to serve in politics. 74% of respondents, spanning 1974-2022, disagree with the question, while 26% agree. Women disagree with the question at a higher rate (42%), compared to men (32%), while women also agree with the question at a slightly higher rate than men (14% compared to 12%). 8 people (0.0%) agreed with the question without sharing their **gender**, while 42 people (0.1%) disagreed.

Figure 2 illustrates how perceptions of women in politics by **gender** have risen and fallen over time. We can see that both men and women agreed the most frequently with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women in 1975, 1977, and 1978 and disagreed the most frequently with this premise in 2021 and 2022. The 1985 and 1986 surveys witnessed an increase of both men and women who agree with the women in politics question, then another increase of women who agree with the question in the 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2000 surveys. The number of both men and women who agreed with the women in politics question rose again slightly in 2006 and 2016. Despite slight fluctuations in more recent years, the number of respondents who agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited

for politics has never reached the same levels as when GSS began asking this question in the 1970s.

The number of respondents by **gender** who disagree with the women in politics question has fluctuated slightly less over time (see Figure 2). The 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2000 surveys saw an increase in the number of women and men who disagree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics, along with 2006 and 2016.

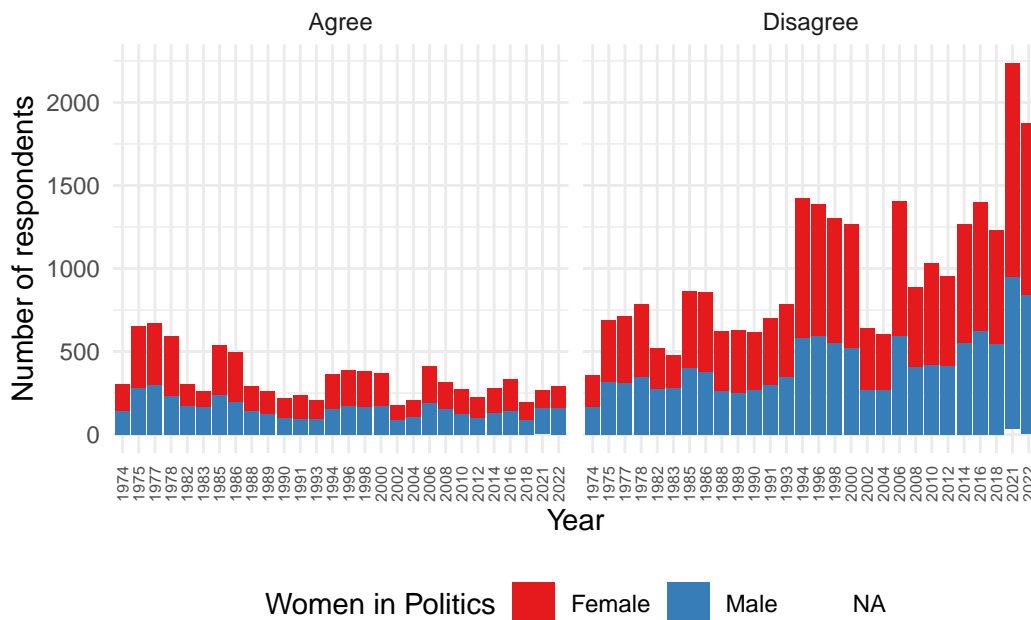


Figure 2: Responses to the women in politics question by year and gender

3.3.2 Political Views

Responses to the women in politics question varies by **political views**, with people who identify as having more liberal views disagreeing, people with more conservative views agreeing, and people with more moderate views generally falling in the middle of liberal- and conservative-minded people (see Figure 3). Liberal views refers to anyone who self-identified as having **Slightly Liberal**, **Liberal**, or **Extremely Liberal** views. Conservative views accounts for anyone who self-identified as having **Slightly Conservative**, **Conservative**, or **Extremely Conservative** views.

1,965 people (18.6%) who self-identify as holding **liberal** views agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics, while 8,625 people (81.4%) disagree with the premise. Of the people who agree, 975 (9.2%) identify as female, 988 (9.3%) identify as male,

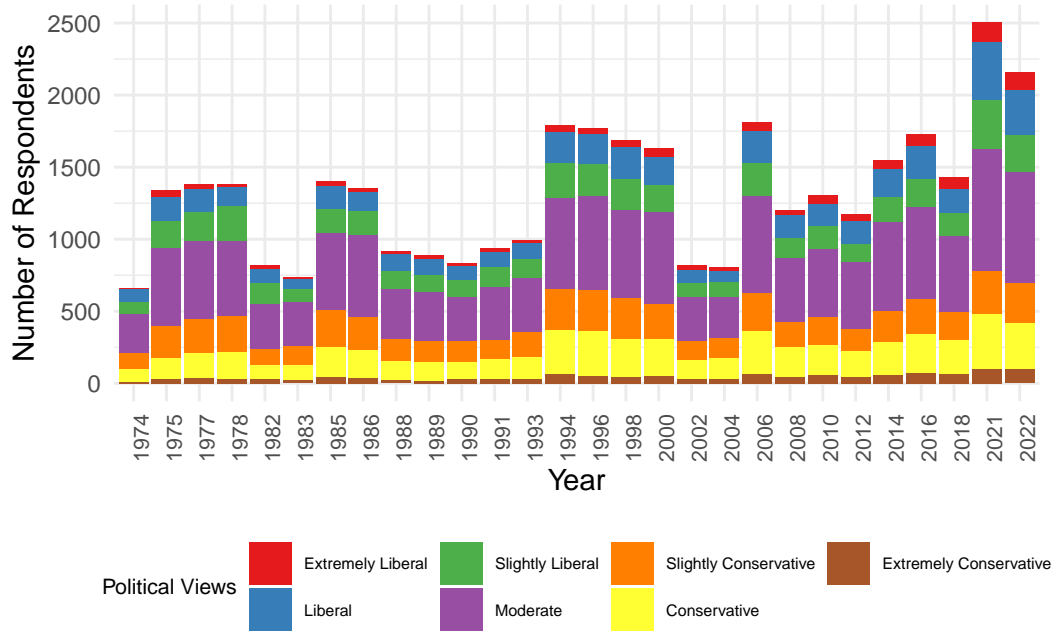


Figure 3: Responses to the women in politics survey question over time by all political views

and 2 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,999 people (47.2%) identify as female, 3,619 identify as male (34.2%), and 7 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

4,015 people (32.2%) who self-identify as holding **conservative** views agree with the premise of the women in politics question, while 8,472 people (67.8%) who self-identify as holding conservative views disagree with the women in politics question. Of the people who agree, 2,069 (16.6%) identify as female, 1,943 (15.6%) identify as male, and 3 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,377 people (35.1%) identify as female, 4,079 identify as male (32.7%), and 16 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

Lastly, among people who self-identify as holding **moderate** views, 3,523 people (25.3%) agree with the women in politics question while 10,405 people (74.7%) disagree. Of the people who agree, 2,074 (14.9%) identify as female, 1,446 (10.4%) identify as male, and 3 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 6,115 people (43.9%) identify as female, 4,271 identify as male (30.7%), and 19 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

3.3.3 Party Identification

Responses to the question whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women varies by political **party identification** (see Figure 4). People who self-identify as aligning with the Democrats disagree at a higher percent than people who self-identify as aligning with the Republicans. Aligning with the Democrats refers to anyone who self-identified in GSS as Strong Democrat, Not Strong Democrat, or Independent, Close to Democrat. Aligning with the Republicans accounts for anyone who self-identified as Strong Republican, Not Strong Republican, or Independent, Close to Republican. Independent refers to people who self-identify with neither the Democrats or Republicans and Other accounts for people who align with a third party or candidate.

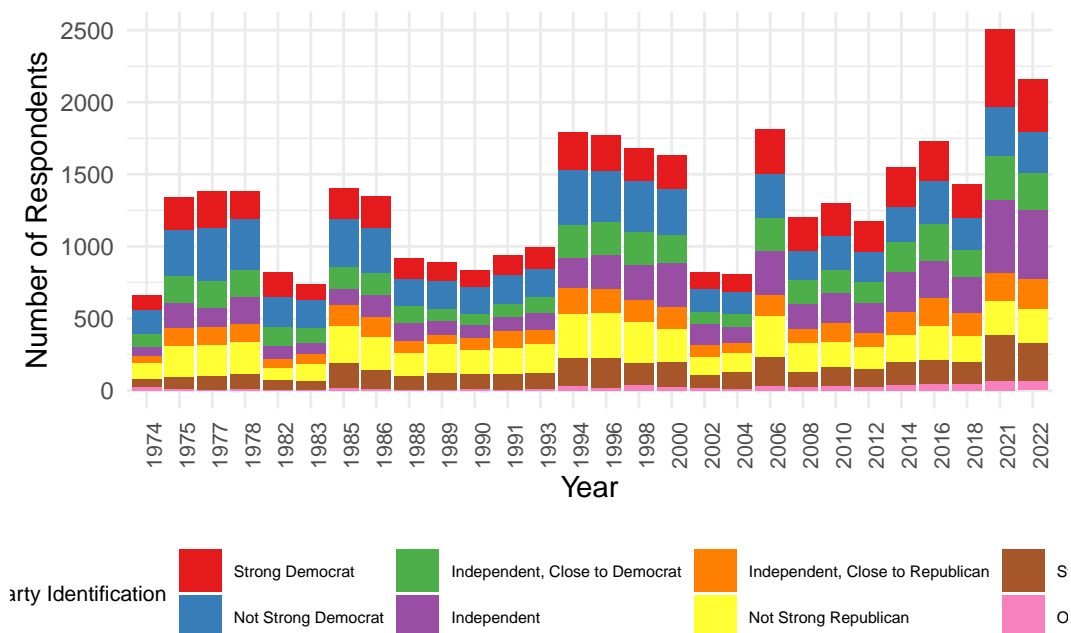


Figure 4: Responses to the women in politics survey question over time by all political views

4,146 people (23%) who self-identify as aligning with the **Democrats** agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, while 13,869 people (77%) who self-identify as being affiliated with the Democrats disagree with the premise. Of the people who agree, 2,286 (12.7%) identify as female, 1,857 (10.3%) identify as male, and 3 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 8,278 people (46.0%) identify as female, 5,578 identify as male (31.0%), and 13 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

4,121 people (31.8%) who self-identify as being affiliated with the **Republicans** agree with the women in politics question, while 8,853 people (68.2%) disagree with the question. Of

the people who agree, 2,174 (16.8%) identify as female, 1,994 (15.0%) identify as male, and 3 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,586 people (35.3%) identify as female, 4,256 identify as male (32.8%), and 11 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

1,128 people (20.8%) agree with the women in politics question while 4,294 people (79.2%) who self-identify as being **independent** from a political party disagree. The break down by gender of those who agree is 619 women (11.4%), 507 men (9.4%), and 2 (0.0%) opted not to share their **gender**. Of the people who disagree, 2,423 (44.7%) identify as female, 1,888 (34.2%) identify as male, and 16 (0.3%) opted not to share their **gender**.

Finally, 486 people (81.8%) who self-identify as being affiliated with a third party disagree with the women in politics question while 108 people (18.2%) agree with the question. Of the people who agree, 39 (6.6%) identify as female and 69 (11.6%) identify as male. The break down by gender of those who disagree is 204 women (34.3%), 280 men (47.1%), and 2 (0.3%) opted not to share their **gender**.

4 Results

This paper aims to evaluate the role of demographic factors, including gender, political views, and party identification on perceptions of whether women are emotionally suited for political office. I am especially interested in seeing whether the combination of the respondent's gender and political views and the respondent's gender and party identification impacts their overall perceptions of women in politics.

Statistical modeling was executed in the statistical programming language R (R Core Team 2023), using `rstanarm` (Goodrich et al. 2023), `gtsummary` (Sjoberg et al. 2021), `marginalEffects` (Arel-Bundock 2023), and `modelsummary` (Arel-Bundock 2022). The model was fit in a Bayesian framework using `rstanarm` (Goodrich et al. 2023). I used the standard weakly informed prior distributions of 2.5 provided in the `rstanarm` package.

4.1 Political Views

The first model considers whether a respondent agreed or disagreed with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, as a function of their gender and political views.

$$\begin{aligned}
y_i | \pi_i &\sim \text{Bern}(\pi_i) \\
\text{logit}(\pi_i) &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{gender}_i + \beta_2 \times \text{political views}_i \\
\beta_0 &\sim \text{Normal}(0, 2.5) \\
\beta_1 &\sim \text{Normal}(0, 2.5) \\
\beta_2 &\sim \text{Normal}(0, 2.5)
\end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

Where y_i is the respondent's views on women in politics and equal to 0 if they agree that men are emotionally better suited and 1 if they disagree, gender_i is the gender of the respondent and political views_i is the political views of the respondent.

Table 1: Examining whether a respondent agrees with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, based on their gender and political views

Characteristic	$\log(\text{OR})^1$	95% CI ¹
gender		
Female	—	—
Male	-0.08	-0.13, -0.03
political_views		
Extremely Liberal	—	—
Liberal	-0.32	-0.51, -0.15
Slightly Liberal	-0.53	-0.72, -0.36
Moderate	-0.79	-0.96, -0.62
Slightly Conservative	-0.89	-1.1, -0.72
Conservative	-1.2	-1.4, -1.1
Extremely Conservative	-1.6	-1.8, -1.4

¹OR = Odds Ratio, CI = Credible Interval

The estimates displayed in Table 1 suggest that men are 8% less likely than women to disagree that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, aligning with previous findings. When respondents who identified as having **Extremely Liberal** political views are compared to those with **Liberal** and **Slightly Liberal** views, **Liberals** are 32% less likely to support women in politics and **Slightly Liberals** are 53% less likely. When compared to respondents with **Extremely Liberal** political views, **Moderates** are 79% less likely to disagree that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women. People with **Slightly Conservative** views, when compared to people with **Extremely Liberal** views are 89% less likely to believe women are emotionally suited for politics, while people with **Conservative** and **Extremely Conservative** views are over 100% not likely to believe that women are emotionally suited for politics. These results align with previous research on views about women in politics by ideological divide, although the views of **Moderates** will be further examined in the [Discussion](#) section.

Table 2: Examining whether a respondent agrees with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, based on their gender and political views

Term	Contrast	Estimate
gender	Male - Female	-0.02
political_views	Liberal - Extremely Liberal	-0.04
political_views	Slightly Liberal - Extremely Liberal	-0.07
political_views	Moderate - Extremely Liberal	-0.12
political_views	Slightly Conservative - Extremely Liberal	-0.14
political_views	Conservative - Extremely Liberal	-0.21
political_views	Extremely Conservative - Extremely Liberal	-0.29

Table 2 investigates whether a respondent agrees with the women in politics question, based on their gender and political views. A larger difference was expected by respondent gender, given previous research, with the model estimating that when compared to women, men are just 2% less likely to disagree that men are emotionally better suited for politics (Barnes and Cassese 2017). When people with **Extremely Liberal** political views are compared to respondents with **Liberal** views, **Liberals** are 4% less likely to disagree that men are emotionally better suited for politics. Respondents with **Slightly Liberal** views, when compared to those with **Extremely Liberal** views, are 7% less likely to disagree. The model emphasizes that the more Liberal a respondent’s views are, the more likely they are to disagree with the premise that women are emotionally not suited for politics. Respondents who identify as having **Moderate** political views are an estimated 12% less likely than those with **Extremely Liberal** views to disagree that men are emotionally better suited for politics. Moreover, when compared to people with **Extremely Liberal** political views, respondents with **Slightly Conservative** views are 14% less likely to disagree. When people with **Conservative** and **Extremely Conservative** views are compared to respondents with **Extremely Liberal** views, they are 21% and 29% respectively less likely to disagree with the premise that women are not emotionally suited for politics compared to men.

Although there are small quantitative differences between respondents with **Liberal** and **Slightly Liberal** views, when compared to respondents with **Extremely Liberal** views, the differences between **Extremely Conservative**, **Conservative**, and **Slightly Conservative** views, when compared to respondents with **Extremely Liberal** views are more distinguishable. It is also interesting that people with **Moderate** views are more closely aligned with people with **Slightly Conservative** views over those with **Slightly Liberal** views, reinforcing the observations published by Davis (2020).

4.2 Party Identification

The second model considers whether a respondent agreed or disagreed with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, as a function of their gender and party identification.

$$\begin{aligned}
y_i | \pi_i &\sim \text{Bern}(\pi_i) \\
\text{logit}(\pi_i) &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{gender}_i + \beta_2 \times \text{party_identification}_i \\
\beta_0 &\sim \text{Normal}(0, 2.5) \\
\beta_1 &\sim \text{Normal}(0, 2.5) \\
\beta_2 &\sim \text{Normal}(0, 2.5)
\end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Where y_i is the respondent's views on women in politics and equal to 0 if they agree that men are emotionally better suited and 1 if they disagree, gender_i is the gender of the respondent and $\text{party_identification}_i$ is the political views of the respondent.

Table 3: Examining whether a respondent agrees with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, based on their gender and party identification

Characteristic	log(OR) ¹	95% CI ¹
gender		
Female	—	—
Male	-0.10	-0.15, -0.05
party_identification		
Strong Democrat	—	—
Not Strong Democrat	-0.08	-0.16, 0.00
Independent, Close to Democrat	0.31	0.22, 0.41
Independent	0.17	0.08, 0.26
Independent, Close to Republican	-0.13	-0.22, -0.03
Not Strong Republican	-0.39	-0.47, -0.31
Strong Republican	-0.63	-0.72, -0.54
Other	0.35	0.14, 0.58

¹OR = Odds Ratio, CI = Credible Interval

Table 3 investigates whether a respondent supports women in politics, on the basis of their gender and party identification. When compared to female respondents, male respondents are 10% less likely to disagree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women. When respondents who identified as having **Strong Democrat** party identifications are compared to those with **Not Strong Democrat** and **Independent, Close to Democrat** views, **Not Strong Democrats** are 8% less likely to support women in politics

Table 4: Examining whether a respondent agrees with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, based on their gender and party identification

Term	Contrast	Estimate
gender	Male - Female	-0.02
party_identification	Not Strong Democrat - Strong Democrat	-0.01
party_identification	Independent, Close to Democrat - Strong Democrat	0.05
party_identification	Independent - Strong Democrat	0.03
party_identification	Independent, Close to Republican - Strong Democrat	-0.02
party_identification	Not Strong Republican - Strong Democrat	-0.08
party_identification	Strong Republican - Strong Democrat	-0.13
party_identification	Other - Strong Democrat	0.06

and **Independent, Close to Democrats** are 31% more likely to support women in politics. **Independents** when compared to **Strong Democrats** are 17% more likely disagree that women are emotionally not suited for politics. Furthermore, when respondents who identified as having **Strong Democrat** party identifications are compared to those with **Independent, Close to Republican, Not Strong Republican**, and **Strong Republican** views, **Independent, Close to Republicans** are 13% less likely, **Not Strong Republicans** are 39% less likely, and **Strong Republicans** are 63% less likely to disagree that women are emotionally not suited for politics. People who identified their party affiliation as being **Other** are an estimated 35% more likely to support women in politics, than compared to people who are **Strong Democrats**. The predictions for Democrats and Republicans close to being Independent, Independents, and Others are particularly interesting as they reveal nuanced beliefs about the role of women in politics, unlike the other respondents who firmly fall along partisan lines.

Table 4 highlights that despite significant partisan differences in views about women in politics, the quantitative differences may not be as stark as anticipated (Barnes and Cassese 2017). When compared to female respondents, male respondents are 2% less likely to disagree with the premise that women are emotionally not suited for politics. **Strong Democrats** when compared to **Not Strong Democrats** are 1% less likely to agree with the women in politics questions, while those who identified as **Independent, Close to Democrat** are 5% more likely to disagree. Respondents with **Independent** views, when compared to **Strong Democrats** are an estimated 3% more likely to disagree with the women in politics question. Furthermore, all when compared to the views of **Strong Democrats, Independent, Close to Republicans** are 2% less likely, **Not Strong Republican** are 8%, and **Strong Republicans** are 13% less likely to disagree with the women in politics survey question. Lastly, respondents who identified themselves as **Other** are an estimated 8% more likely to disagree that women are emotionally not suited for politics, compared to **Strong Democrats**. The results in Table 4 emphasize that despite partisan divides and views, perceptions of the emotional

viability of women in serve in politics across the spectrum is better than anticipated.

5 Discussion

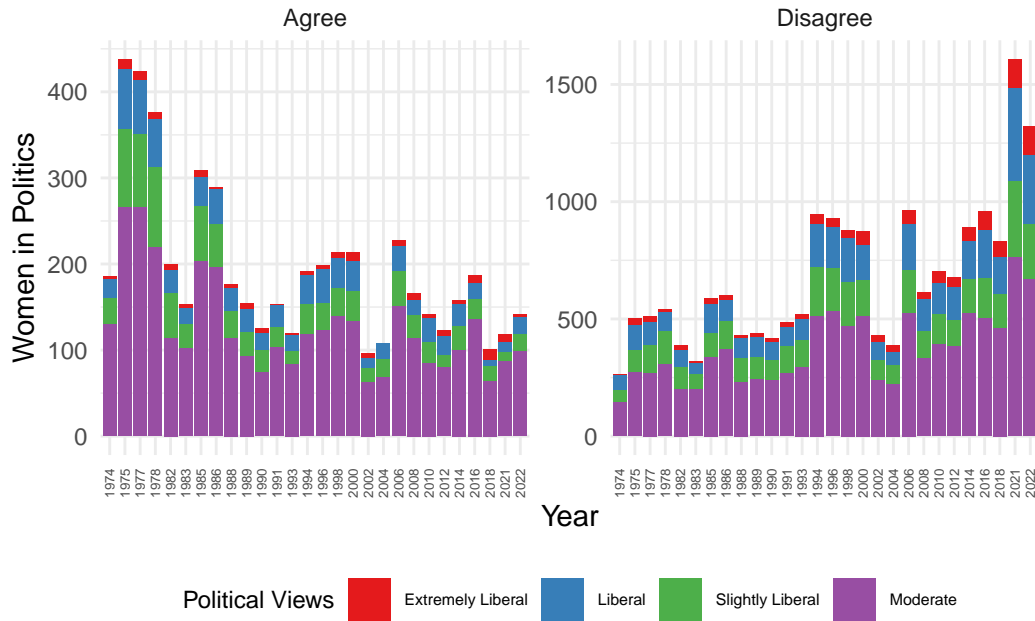
Despite gendered framing by the traditional media, the public largely sees women as being emotionally fit to serve as elected officials (74.3% of respondents believe women are emotionally fit). Support for women in politics by gender has risen and fallen over time, potentially responding to election candidates, socio-cultural phenomena, and important news stories of the times (see Figure 2). As hypothesized, women disagree with the question of whether men are emotionally suited for politics than them at a higher rate, although the gap between genders is not as large as anticipated (see Table 2 and Table 4). With nearly three quarters of respondents disagreeing with the premise that men are more emotionally fit than women for politics, it is important to consider other factors that may be holding us back from achieving gender equality.

5.1 Perceptions of Women in Politics by Political Views

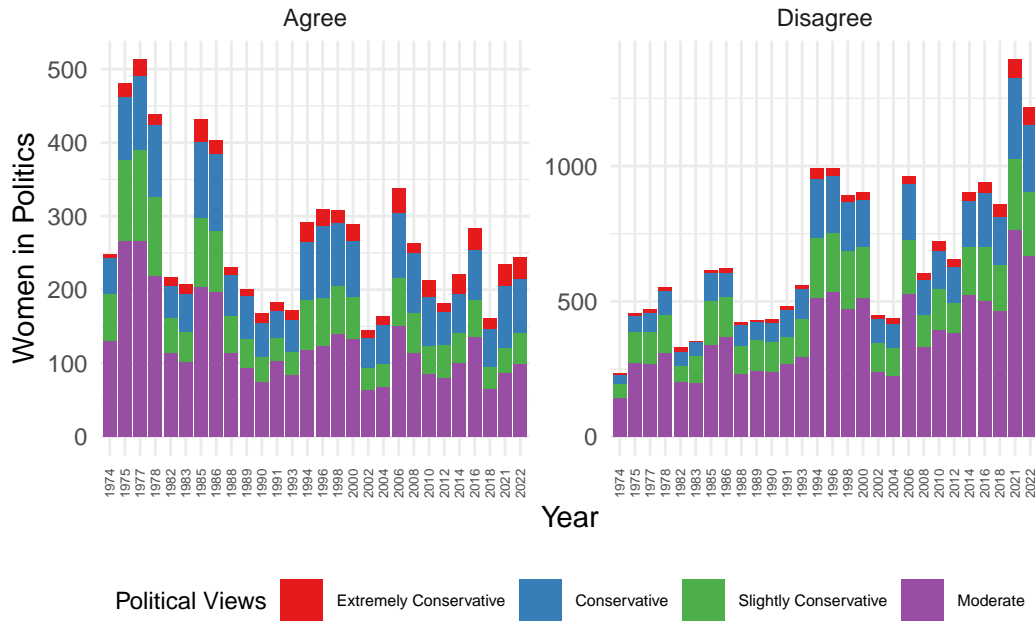
The number of people with **Liberal** views who disagree with the question that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women is comparable to the hypothesized number, while the people with **Conservative** views who agree is not as high as anticipated, but still aligns with my hypothesis. My hypothesis did not account for people with **Moderate** views as the way people with moderate views feel about specific policy issues and survey questions is not consistent nor aligns with a single political party. However, in the case of the women in politics survey question, the people who identified as moderate aligned generally in the middle of people with liberal and conservative views, but leaned a little closer to respondents with **Slightly Conservative** views instead of **Slightly Liberal** views (see Table 1 and Table 2). The model's predictions align with Davis (2020), who notes that moderate voters are not necessarily centrist but instead hold more moderate views on typically liberal and conservative policy perspectives.

5.1.1 Perceptions of Women in Politics - Moderates versus Liberals and Conservatives

Defining a “moderate” voter in American politics proves challenging and is a weakness of this survey (further discussed in [Limitations](#)). Scholars view moderates as not simply holding “middle of the road views”, rather sharing moderate views of either liberals or conservatives on occasion if the social, economic, or political context aligns with their beliefs (Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner 2012; Davis 2020). Data from GSS reveals that people with moderate views fall in between people with liberal views and people with conservative views when both agreeing and disagreeing with the women in politics question (see Figure 5). People with moderate views and people with liberal views hold somewhat similar views to the women in politics question (74.7%



(a) Liberals & Moderates



(b) Conservatives & Moderates

Figure 5: Comparing Moderate and Liberal and Moderate and Conservative perceptions of women in politics over time

versus 81.4%). When broken down by gender, 47.2% of liberal-identifying women disagree with the women in politics question, while 43.9% of moderate-identifying women disagree. 34.2% of liberal-identifying men disagree, while 30.7% of moderate-identifying men disagree. Moreover, 9.2% of liberal-identifying women agree, while 14.9% of moderate-identifying women agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics. 9.3% of liberal-identifying men agree, while 10.4% of moderate-identifying men agree. In these circumstances, when analyzed by gender, the gap between people with liberal and moderate views closes slightly.

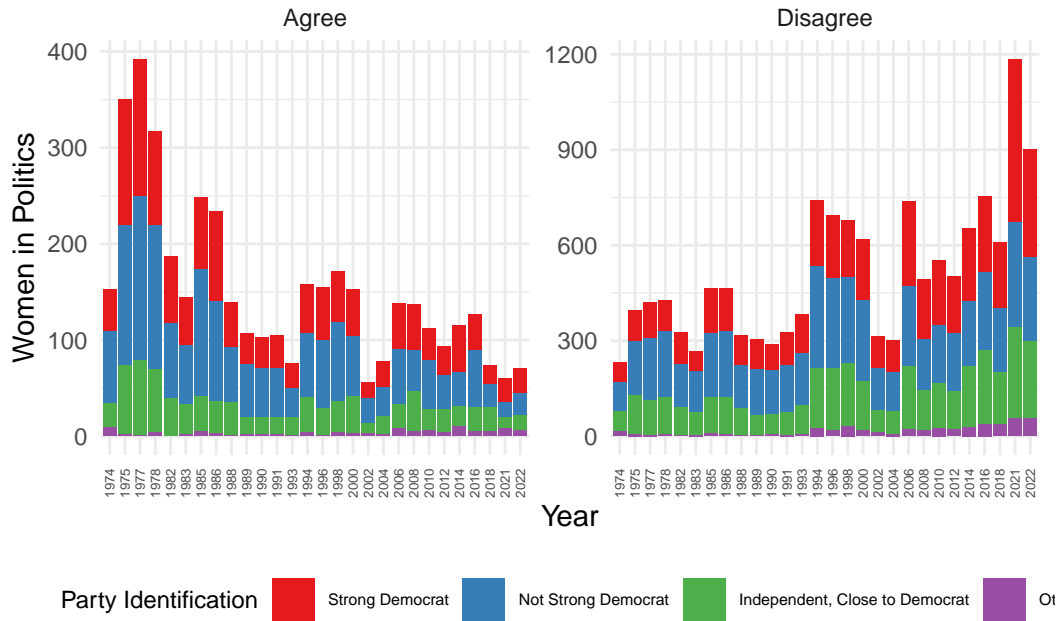
In contrast, people with moderate views and people with conservative views also hold somewhat similar beliefs (74.7% versus 67.8%). When broken down by gender, 35.1% of conservative-identifying women disagree with the women in politics question, while 43.9% of moderate-identifying women disagree. 32.7% of conservative-identifying men disagree, while 30.7% of moderate-identifying men disagree. Moreover, 16.6% of conservative-identifying women agree, while 14.9% of moderate-identifying women agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics. 15.6% of conservative-identifying men agree, while 10.4% of moderate-identifying men agree. When analyzed by gender, the gap between people with conservative and moderate views aligns a little more closely, especially the number of women who agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics. A larger number of conservative-identifying men agree than moderate-identifying men with the women in politics question.

While there is often significant disagreement between liberals, conservatives, and sometimes moderates in American politics, it is noteworthy that moderates generally hold “middle of the road views” on the women in politics question (Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner 2012).

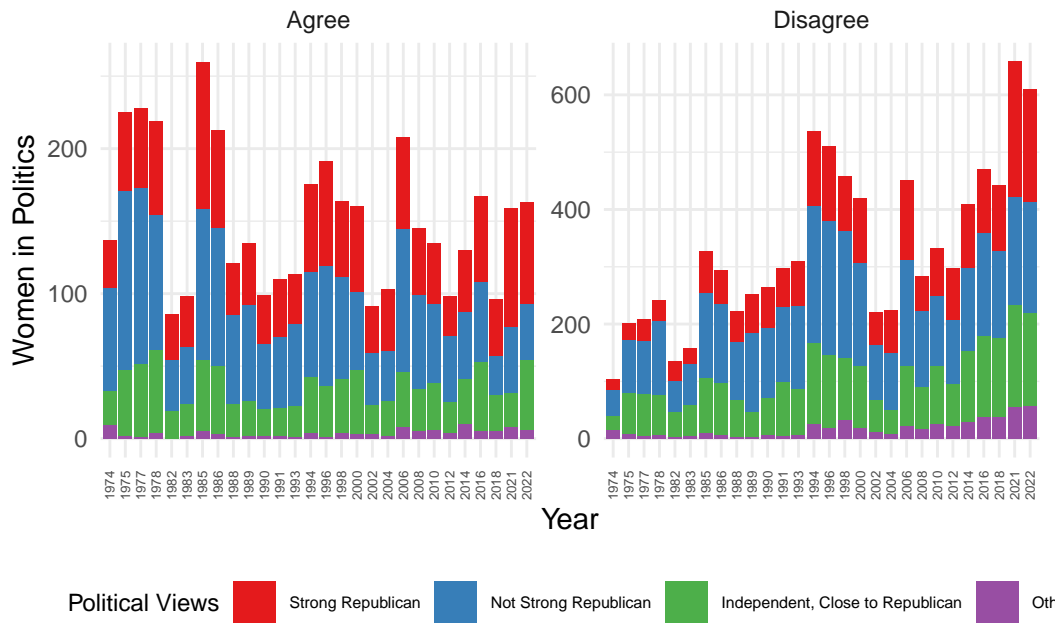
5.2 Perceptions of Women in Politics by Party Identification

Despite assumptions and previous research, the data illustrates that perceptions of the emotional viability of women to serve in politics matches political party stances (Democrat and Republican) on the matter, but the results are not as negative and that public is more supportive of women running for elected office than anticipated (see Table 3 and Figure 6). The support of women in politics falls along party lines and is more positive than the ratios of women elected to the House of Representatives and the Senate from each party. Currently, there are 92 Democrat women (21%) and 33 Republican women (8%) elected to the House of Representatives (which has 435 members in total) (American Women and Politics 2023). There are 15 Democrat women (15%), 9 Republican women (9%), and 1 Independent woman (1%) elected to the Senate (which has 100 members in total) (American Women and Politics 2023).

Table 3 shows that respondents who identify as **Independent, Close to Democrat** are an estimated 31% more likely to support women in politics, in comparison to **Strong Democrats**, which nearly matches the model’s predictions for **Others** who are an estimated 35% more likely support women in politics. This is in contrast to **Independent, Close to Republicans** who



(a) Democrats & Other



(b) Republicans & Other

Figure 6: Comparing Democrat and Other party identifications and Republican and Other party identifications perceptions of women in politics over time

are 13% less likely to support women in politics, when compared to **Strong Democrats**. The model’s predictions are therefore suggesting that people with **Other** political views may be disillusioned Democrats or people who identify with third parties on the left of the political spectrum, instead of the right.

The results from Table 4, highlighting how **Others** are an estimated 8% more likely to disagree with the women in politics question than **Strong Democrats** leaves room for questions about the nature of respondents selecting this option. As highlighted by Figure 6, respondents who identify with **Other** political parties and both agree and disagree with the women in politics question has risen in recent years, following a small decline in 2000, 2002, and 2004. Referencing previous research, one can assume that those who selected **Other** may have political views further to the left of the Democrats on the political spectrum, but without an opportunity for respondents to provide a short written response or interview, this option will remain ambiguous and a further area of study (Davis 2020).

5.3 Limitations

Asking people about their political views and potential party affiliation remain sensitive topics in American society. As a result, some people may not be comfortable answering these questions which limits the diversity of potential responses collected by GSS.

Starting from the assumption that respondents are likely to have political party views and party identifications that closely align with either of the two dominant political parties makes it challenging to collect accurate data about those who do not subscribe to either the Republican or Democrat playbooks (Davis 2020). Specifically, ambiguous survey question response options, such as **Moderate** (from the political views question) and **Other** (from the party identification question) should be expanded and clarified to ensure that the increasing number of people who find themselves aligning somewhere in the middle are not overlooked in the survey results (Fowler et al. 2023). Understanding Moderate political views and Other party identifications is more nuanced than simply selecting “agree” or “disagree” on a survey, so without an opportunity for people to explain their views through an open-ended text box, important information which helps contextualize why respondents do or do not believe women are emotionally viable to serve in elected office is missed.

Likewise, previous research has shown that people may have social desirability bias and mask their true beliefs when asked about topics such as the viability of women to serve in elected office (Holman 2023; Stauffer and O’Brien 2018). Social desirability bias could be impacting the quality of the data collected, resulting in a significant number of “No Answer” responses, especially from respondents who complete the survey through the face-to-face and telephone modes.

Despite the changing variable names to account for newer survey methods, the question asking whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women hearkens back to the

1970s, regardless of the strides being made toward gender equality in politics. The phrasing of the question asking whether men are better emotionally suited is a leading question which is biased and primes the respondent to think about women in a specific way, reinforcing gender stereotypes (Stauffer and O'Brien 2018). The media often frames women as being emotional, high strung, and not possessing “manly” leadership skills, whereas men are never asked about their emotions or have their behavior in the public eye covered through the lens of being emotional (Bashevkin 2009; Courtemanche and Connor Green 2020). The same should be expected for the media coverage of women in politics and by extension, how the public is surveyed surrounding topics of women’s political leadership and representation. GSS should consider asking respondents in future iterations of the survey about leadership qualities, relevant experience, and ability to address crucial policy issues. New phrasings of the women in politics survey question must account for the current progress being made toward gender equality, today’s hybrid media environment, and the role that social media plays in disseminating political rhetoric and shaping the image of political candidates (Van der Pas and Aaldering 2020).

Finally, GSS’ changing sampling methodology over time may have lead to the imbalance of respondents by **gender**. This imbalance means that people who self-identify as female are represented at a slightly higher rate than people who self-identify as male, meaning readers should be aware when drawing conclusions about gendered perceptions of women in politics. Furthermore, other changes in methodology due to the Covid-19 pandemic may have impacted more recent responses, especially since access to reliable internet, cell phone service, and technological literacy are not a given among all respondents.

6 Conclusion

Utilizing data from the U.S. General Social Survey, this paper analyzes and models perceptions of the emotional viability of women to serve in politics by political views and party identification over time from 1974 to 2022, in correlation with demographic factors such as gender and age. My results reveal that despite gendered media framing, the public is generally supportive of women seeking elected office. People self-identifying as Democrats and people with liberal and liberal-learning political views are more supportive of women in politics. However, the number of people who self-identify as Republicans and people with conservative and conservative-learning political views were more supportive of women in politics than anticipated. People who self-identify as having Moderate views generally hold “middle of the road” beliefs in response to the women in politics question, falling slightly closer to respondents with self-identified slightly conservative views. However, the views of Moderates and people affiliated with Other political parties, must be further studied in correlation with the women in politics question to develop a clearer understanding of the nuanced intersection of these topics.

Future studies should take into account the intersection of other demographic factors, political views, and party identifications while contextualizing responses to the women in politics question in the larger contemporary socio-cultural, economic, and political environment. In particular, future research should look at the intersection of race and identity, income, and highest level of education attained with these questions about political views, party identification, and the emotional viability of women to run for office. Future studies should also analyze political party structures, including candidate recruitment, the workplace culture in city halls, state legislatures, the House of Representatives, and the Senate, and the role of social media to help understand and correct course. Further emphasis should be placed on how methodologies, including survey questions are employed, ensuring gender-based stereotypes are not reinforced or the leadership roles of women in politics are not diminished (Stauffer and O'Brien 2018).

While media framing and corresponding public perceptions may not be as large of a problem as anticipated, we must work to understand all contributing factors to the low success rate of electing women to the top political offices in the U.S. and across the world. We cannot let gender equality take another 100 years of hard-fought victories to materialize (Forum 2022).

References

- Aaldering, Loes, and Daphne Joanna Van Der Pas. 2020. "Political Leadership in the Media: Gender Bias in Leader Stereotypes During Campaign and Routine Times." *British Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 911–31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123417000795>.
- American Women, Center for, and Politics. 2023. "Women in Elective Office 2023." <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/current-numbers/women-elective-office-2023>.
- Arel-Bundock, Vincent. 2022. "modelssummary: Data and Model Summaries in R." *Journal of Statistical Software* 103: 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v103.i01>.
- . 2023. *marginaleffects: Predictions, comparisons, slopes, marginal means, and hypothesis tests*. <https://vincentarelbundock.github.io/marginaleffects/>.
- Barnes, Tiffany D, and Erin C Cassese. 2017. "American Party Women: A Look at the Gender Gap Within Parties." *Political Research Quarterly* 70(1): 127–41.
- Bashevkin, Sylvia. 2009. *Women, Power, Politics: The Hidden Story of Canada's Unfinished Democracy*.
- Carmines, Edward G, Michael J Ensley, and Michael W Wagner. 2012. "Political Ideology in American Politics: One, Two, or None?" 10(3).
- Courtemanche, Marie, and Joanne Connor Green. 2020. "A Fall from Grace: Women, Scandals, and Perceptions of Politicians." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 41(2): 219–40.
- Davis, Richard. 2020. *Beyond Donkeys and Elephants: Minor Political Parties in Contemporary American Politics*. University Press of Kansas.
- de Geus, Roosmarijn, Erin Tolley, Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, and Peter John Loewen. 2021. *Women, Power, and Political Representation: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives*. University of Toronto Press.
- Diekman, Amanda B, Alice H Eagly, and Patrick Kulesa. 2002. "Accuracy and Bias in

- Stereotypes about the Social and Political Attitudes of Women and Men.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 38(3): 268–82. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jesp.2001.1511>.
- Dolan, Kathleen. 2014. “Gender Stereotypes, Candidate Evaluations, and Voting for Women Candidates: What Really Matters?” *Political Research Quarterly* 67(1): 96–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912913487949>.
- Dolan, Kathleen, and Michael Hansen. 2018. “Blaming Women or Blaming the System? Public Perceptions of Women’s Underrepresentation in Elected Office.” *Political Research Quarterly* 71(3): 668–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918755972>.
- Dolan, Kathleen, and Timothy Lynch. 2015. “Making the Connection? Attitudes about Women in Politics and Voting for Women Candidates.” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 3(1): 111–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2014.992796>.
- Firke, Sam. 2023. *janitor: Simple Tools for Examining and Cleaning Dirty Data*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=janitor>.
- Forum, The World Economic. 2022. *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*. The World Economic Forum. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf.
- Fowler, Anthony et al. 2023. “Moderates.” *American Political Science Review* 117(2): 643–60.
- Goodrich, Ben, Jonah Gabry, Imad Ali, and Sam Brilleman. 2023. *rstanarm: Bayesian applied regression modeling via Stan*. <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/rstanarm/index.html>.
- Holman, Mirya R. 2023. “Gender Stereotyping Questions Accurately Measure Beliefs about the Traits and Issue Strengths of Women and Men in Politics.” *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 44(1): 90–104.
- Jennings, M Kent. 2006. “The Gender Gap in Attitudes and Beliefs about the Place of Women in American Political Life: A Longitudinal, Cross-Generational Analysis.” *Politics & Gender* 2(2): 193–219. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X06060089>.
- Larmarange, Joseph et al. 2023. *Labelled: Manipulating labelled data*. <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/labelled/index.html>.
- McCombs, Maxwell, Donald L Shaw, and David Weaver. 1997. *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Müller, Kirill, and Jennifer Bryan. 2020. *here: A Simpler Way to Find Your Files*. <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/here/index.html>.
- NORC. 2022a. *2022 GSS Codebook - Cross-Section Study*. <https://gss.norc.org/Documents/codebook/GSS%202022%20Codebook.pdf>.
- . 2022b. *The General Social Survey*. <https://gss.norc.org/>.
- R Core Team. 2023. *R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing*. Vienna, Austria: R Foundation for Statistical Computing. <https://www.R-project.org/>.
- Ren, Kun, and Kenton Russell. 2021. *formattable: Create “Formattable” Data Structures*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=formattable>.
- Sjoberg, Daniel D et al. 2021. “Reproducible Summary Tables with the Gtsummary Package.” *The R Journal* 13(1): 570–80. <https://hal.ird.fr/ird-03883594/>.
- Stauffer, Katelyn E, and Diana Z O’Brien. 2018. “Quantitative Methods and Feminist Political

- Science.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.210>.
- Van der Pas, Daphne Joanna, and Loes Aaldering. 2020. “Gender Differences in Political Media Coverage: A Meta-Analysis.” *Journal of Communication* 70(1): 114–43. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqz046>.
- Welch, Susan, and Lee Sigelman. 1982. “Changes in Public Attitudes Toward Women in Politics.” *Social Science Quarterly* 63(2): 312–22.
- Wickham, Hadley. 2016. *ggplot2: Elegant Graphics for Data Analysis*. Springer-Verlag New York. <https://ggplot2.tidyverse.org>.
- Wickham, Hadley et al. 2019. “Welcome to the tidyverse.” *Journal of Open Source Software* 4(43): 1686.
- Wickham, Hadley, Romain François, Lionel Henry, and Kirill Müller. 2023. *dplyr: A Grammar of Data Manipulation*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=dplyr>.
- Wickham, Hadley, Evan Miller, and Danny Smith. 2022. *haven: Import and Export “SPSS,” “Stata” and “SAS” Files*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=haven>.
- Xie, Yihui. 2014. *knitr: A Comprehensive Tool for Reproducible Research in R*. eds. Victoria Stodden, Friedrich Leisch, and Roger D. Peng. Chapman; Hall/CRC. <http://www.crcpress.com/product/isbn/9781466561595>.
- Zhu, Hao. 2021. *kableExtra: Construct Complex Table with “kable” and Pipe Syntax*. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=kableExtra>.