

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

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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 gender, 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.

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## 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%) (Center for 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, and 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 measurement of public attitudes toward various social, economic, and political issues, including evaluating perceptions of women in politics using survey data has many research precedents. 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. Previous scholars employed GSS data as the sole data source or as a way to augment other national or specific research-creation survey data, often focusing on answers to demographic or economic questions. 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, 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 variable `sex` which provide insight into respondents’ gender. I then obtained data relating to the emotional viability of women in

serve in politics, encompassed in the variables `fepol`, `fepolv`, and `fepolnv`. 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).

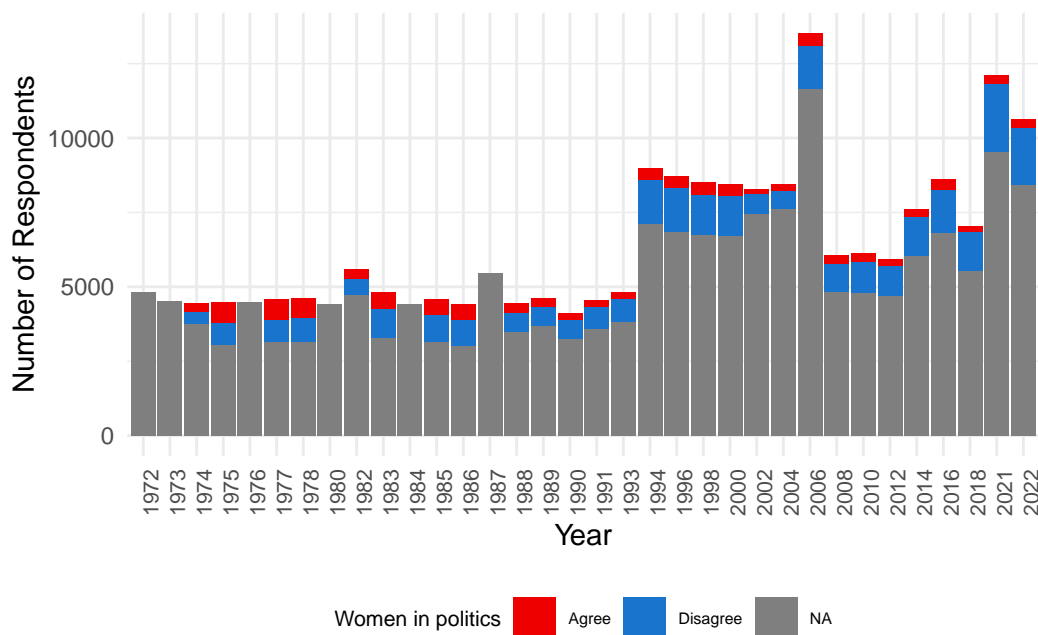


Figure 1: Distribution of responses to the Women in Politics question by year to highlight the number of “No Answer” responses

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 by Holman (2023) and Claassen and Ryan (2016) suggest that social desirability bias impacts respondents’ willingness to reveal their true beliefs about social issues such as the role of women in politics, while Gelman et al. (2016) found that fluctuations in non responses are often linked to perceptions of how well a candidate or political party are doing at the time of the survey, therefore if a candidate or party is ahead in the polls, supporters are

Table 1: Distribution of responses to the Political Views and Party Identification questions to highlight the number of “No Answer” responses

(a) Political Views		
Political Views	Number of Responses	Percentage
Extremely Liberal	6243	3%
Liberal	22869	11%
Slightly Liberal	23700	11%
Moderate	71976	33%
Slightly Conservative	28788	13%
Conservative	28083	13%
Extremely Conservative	6495	3%
NA	29016	13%
(b) Party Identification		
Party Identification	Number of Responses	Percentage
Strong Democrat	35385	16%
Not Strong Democrat	42858	20%
Independent, Close to Democrat	25989	12%
Other	3876	2%
Independent, Close to Republican	19134	9%
Not Strong Republican	32034	15%
Strong Republican	21819	10%
Independent	34620	16%
NA	1455	1%

more likely to respond. These identified factors are limitations of this survey and are likely affecting the number of responses collected (further discussed in [Limitations](#)).

In comparison to the women in politics survey question, the political views and party identification questions have far fewer respondents select “No Answer”, as highlighted by Table 1. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of responses over time, with the years in which the political views and party identification questions were not asked shown solely as “NA” or omitted. The political views question was answered by 99% of respondents, while the party identification question was answered by 87% of respondents. These percentages emphasize that while respondents are generally comfortable sharing information regarding their political views and political party affiliation, there is a high level of discomfort when talking about the role of women in politics.

## 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).

### 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 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



Table 2: Number of responses between 1974 and 2022 shown by respondent gender

Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Female	20609	56%
Male	16346	44%
NA	50	0%

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%) opting not to share their gender (see Table 2). 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%) agreed with the question without sharing their gender, while 42 people (0%) 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.

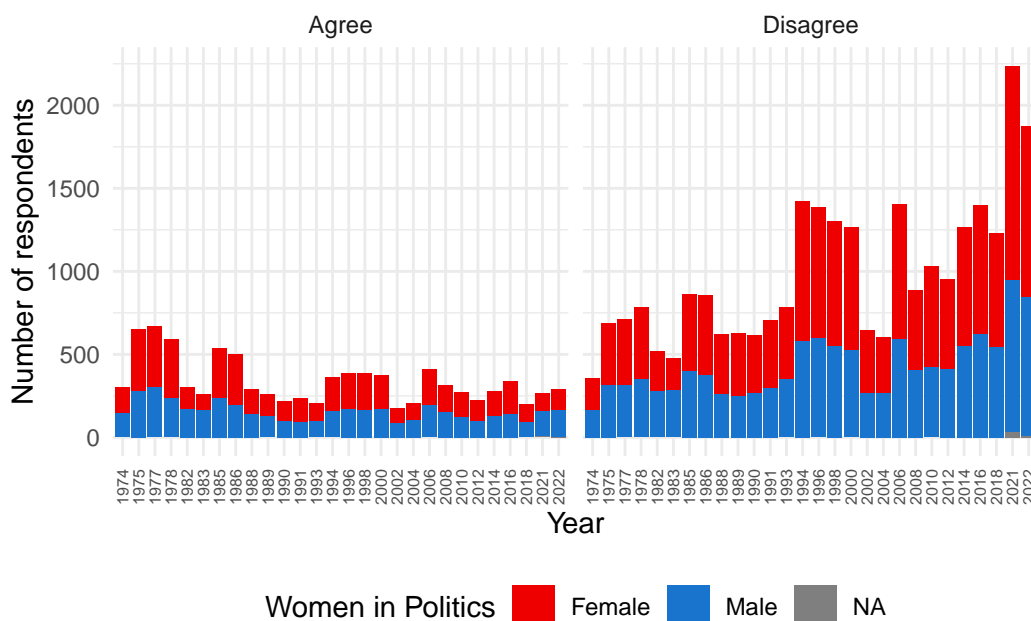


Figure 2: Responses to the question asking whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women by year and respondent gender

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.

### 3.3.2 Political Views

Responses to the women in politics question varies by political view, 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.

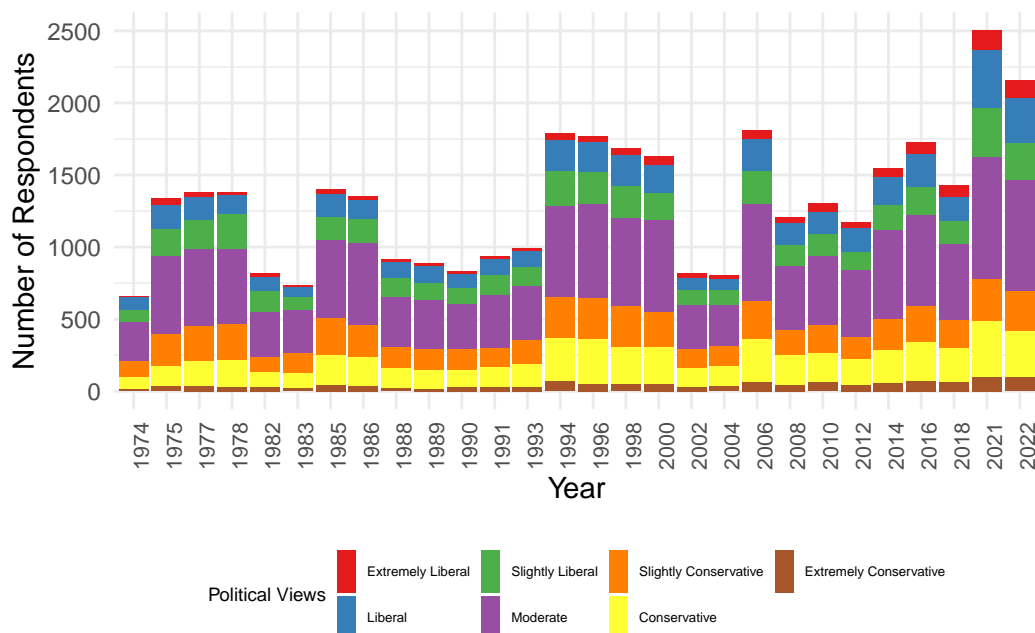


Figure 3: Responses from respondents with all political views to the question asking whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women from 1974-2022

1,965 people (19%) who self-identify as holding Liberal views agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics, while 8,625 people (81%) disagree with the premise. Of the people who agree, 975 (9%) identify as female, 988 (9%) identify as male, and 2 (0%) opted not to identify their gender. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,999 people (47%) identify as female, 3,619 identify as male (34%), and 7 (0%) opted not to identify their gender.

4,015 people (32%) who self-identify as holding Conservative views agree with the premise of the women in politics question, while 8,472 people (68%) who self-identify as holding Conservative views disagree with the women in politics question. Of the people who agree, 2,069 (17%) identify as female, 1,943 (16%) identify as male, and 3 (0%) opted not to identify their gender. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,377 people (35%) identify as female, 4,079 identify as male (33%), and 16 (0%) opted not to identify their gender.

Lastly, among people who self-identify as holding Moderate views, 3,523 people (25%) agree with the women in politics question while 10,405 people (75%) disagree. Of the people who agree, 2,074 (15%) identify as female, 1,446 (10%) identify as male, and 3 (0%) opted not to identify their gender. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 6,115 people

(44%) identify as female, 4,271 identify as male (31%), and 19 (0%) 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.

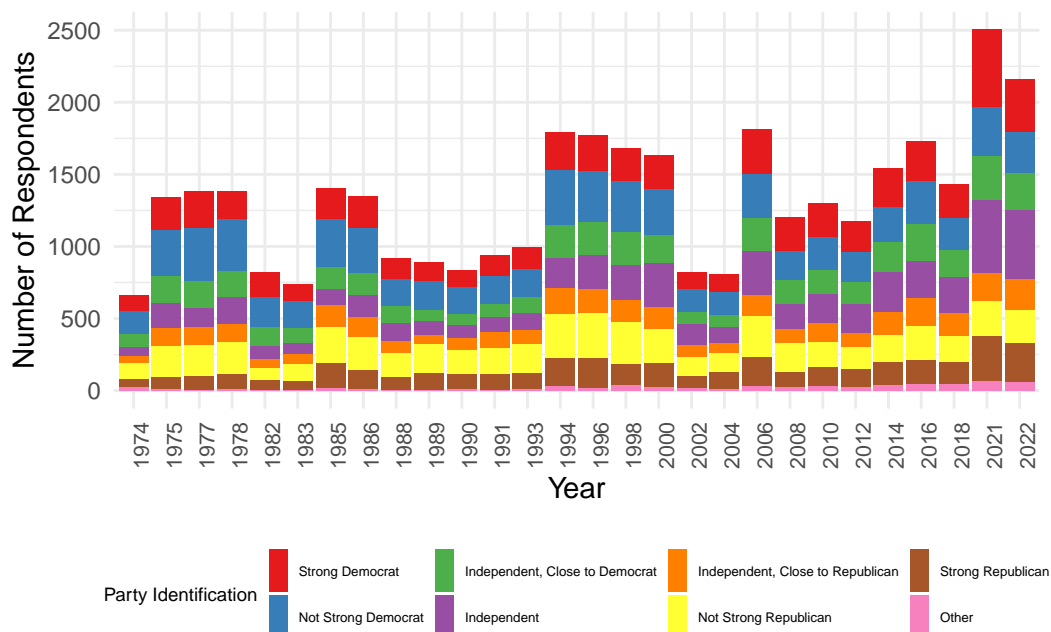


Figure 4: Responses from respondents with all party identifications to the question asking whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women from 1974-2022

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 (13%) identify as female, 1,857 (10%) identify as male, and 3 (0%) opted not to identify their gender. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question,

8,278 people (46%) identify as female, 5,578 identify as male (31%), and 13 (0%) opted not to identify their gender\*.

4,121 people (32%) who self-identify as being affiliated with the Republicans agree with the women in politics question, while 8,853 people (68%) disagree with the question. Of the people who agree, 2,174 (17%) identify as female, 1,994 (15%) identify as male, and 3 (0%) opted not to identify their gender. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,586 people (35%) identify as female, 4,256 identify as male (33%), and 11 (0%) opted not to identify their gender.

1,128 people (21%) agree with the women in politics question while 4,294 people (79%) who self-identify as being Independent from a political party disagree. The break down by gender of those who agree is 619 women (11%), 507 men (9%), and 2 (0%) opted not to share their gender. Of the people who disagree, 2,423 (45%) identify as female, 1,888 (34%) identify as male, and 16 (0%) opted not to share their gender.

Finally, 486 people (82%) who self-identify as being affiliated with a third party disagree with the women in politics question while 108 people (18%) agree with the question. Of the people who agree, 39 (7%) identify as female and 69 (12%) identify as male. The break down by gender of those who disagree is 204 women (34%), 280 men (47%), 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. Consequently, statistical modeling was executed using the statistical programming language R (R Core Team 2023), employing `rstanarm` (Goodrich et al. 2023), `gtsummary` (Sjoberg et al. 2021), `marginalEffects` (Arel-Bundock 2023), and `modelsummary` (Arel-Bundock 2022). Both models were fit in a Bayesian framework using `rstanarm` (Goodrich et al. 2023). For the priors, I followed the standard weakly informed prior distributions by using the normal definition with mean 0 and standard deviation 2.5 as used 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,  $\text{gender}_i$  is the gender of the respondent and  $\text{political views}_i$  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 political views

Characteristic	$\log(\text{OR})^1$	95% CI <sup>1</sup>
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

<sup>1</sup>OR = Odds Ratio, CI = Credible Interval

The estimates generated by the model are displayed in Table 3. Table 3 shows the estimates as log odds ratios. For ease of analysis, Table 4 displays the estimates as predictions, where only one variable changes at a time.

Table 4 predicts whether a respondent agrees with the women in politics question, based on their gender and political views. The model is designed to only change one variable at a time while the others remain constant and assumes all else is equal. A larger difference was expected by respondent gender, given previous research, with the model estimating that when compared to women, men are an estimated 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 an estimated 7% less likely

Table 4: Predicting 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

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 an estimated 14% less likely to disagree. When people with Conservative views are compared to respondents with Extremely Liberal views, they are an estimated 21% less likely to disagree with the question, while Extremely Conservatives are an estimated 29% less likely to disagree.

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,  $\text{gender}_i$  is the gender of the respondent and  $\text{party identification}_i$  is the political views of the respondent.

Table 5: 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	$\log(\text{OR})^1$	95% CI <sup>1</sup>
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

<sup>1</sup>OR = Odds Ratio, CI = Credible Interval

The estimates generated by the second model are shown in Table 5. Table 5 displays the estimates as log odds ratios. For ease of analysis, Table 6 displays the estimates as predictions, where only one variable changes at a time.

Table 6 highlights that despite significant partisan differences in views about women in politics, the quantitative differences predicted by the model may not be as stark as anticipated (Barnes and Cassese 2017). The model is designed to only change one variable at a time while the others remain constant and assumes all else is equal. When compared to women, men are an estimated 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 an estimated 1% less likely to disagree with the women in politics question, while those who identified as Independent, Close to Democrat are an estimated 5% more likely to disagree. Respondents



Table 6: Predicting 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

with Independent views, when compared to Strong Democrats are an estimated 3% more likely to disagree with the women in politics question. Furthermore, when compared to the views of Strong Democrats, Independent, Close to Republicans are an estimated 2% less likely to disagree, while Not Strong Republicans are an estimated 8% less likely to disagree. When compared to Strong Democrats, Strong Republicans are an estimated 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 6 emphasize that despite partisan divides and views, perceptions of the emotional viability of women in serve in politics across the spectrum are 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. 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 4 and Table 6). With 74% 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.

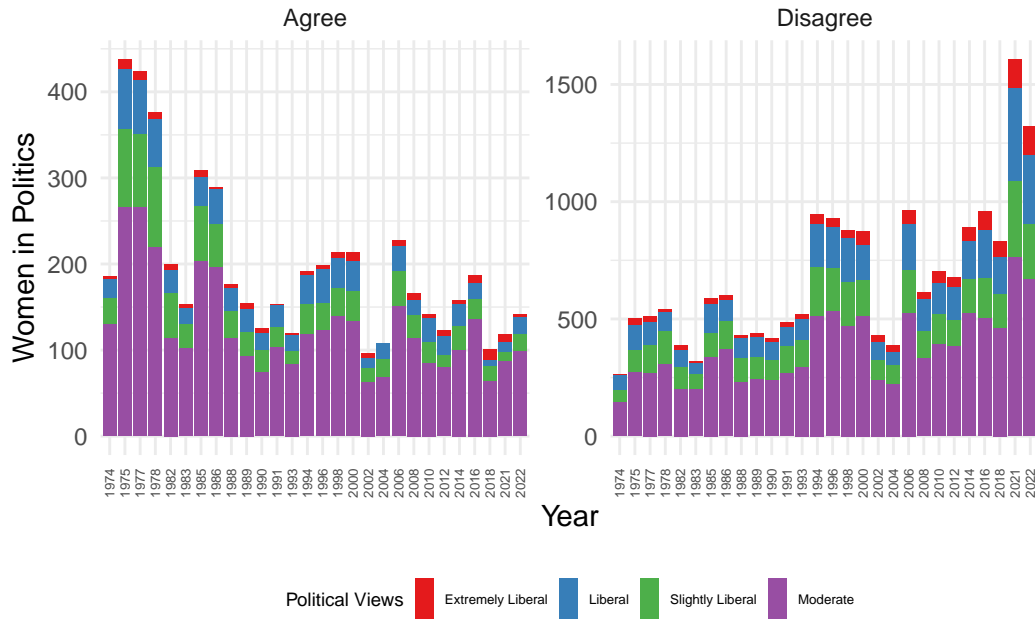
## 5.1 Perceptions of Women in Politics by Political Views

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 3 and Table 4). 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.

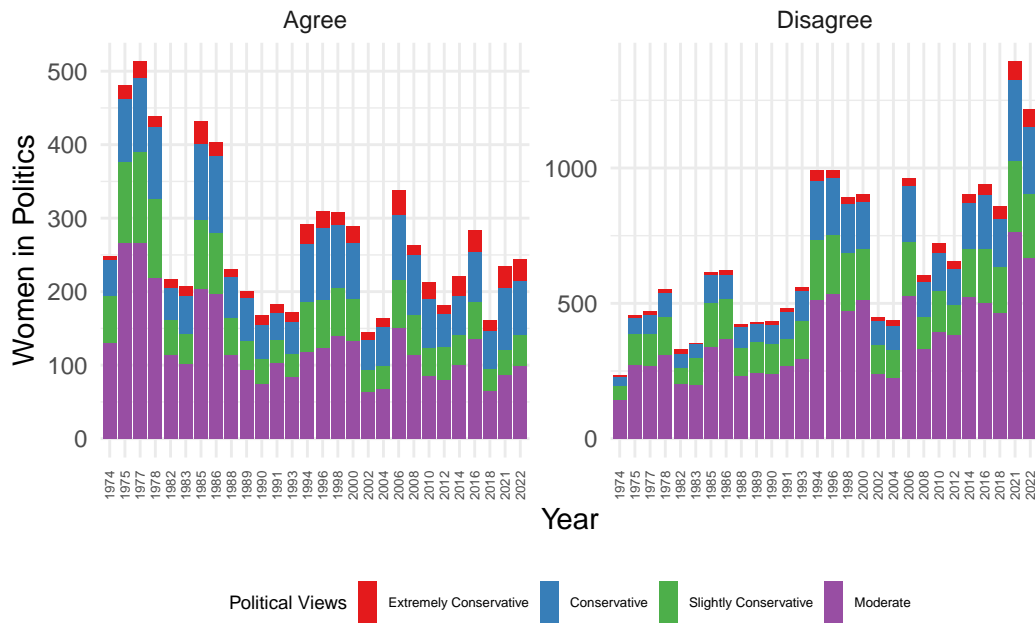
### 5.1.1 Perceptions of Women in Politics - Moderates versus Liberals and Conservatives

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 (75% versus 81%). When broken down by gender, 47% of liberal-identifying women disagree with the women in politics question, while 44% of moderate-identifying women disagree. 34% of liberal-identifying men disagree, while 31% of moderate-identifying men disagree. Moreover, 9% of liberal-identifying women agree, while 15% of moderate-identifying women agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics. 9% of liberal-identifying men agree, while 10% 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 (75% versus 68%). When broken down by gender, 35% of conservative-identifying women disagree with the women in politics question, while 44% of moderate-identifying women disagree. 33% of conservative-identifying men disagree, while 31% of moderate-identifying men disagree. Moreover, 17% of conservative-identifying women agree, while 15% of moderate-identifying women agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics. 16% of conservative-identifying men agree, while 10% 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



(a) Liberals & Moderates



(b) Conservatives & Moderates

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

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.

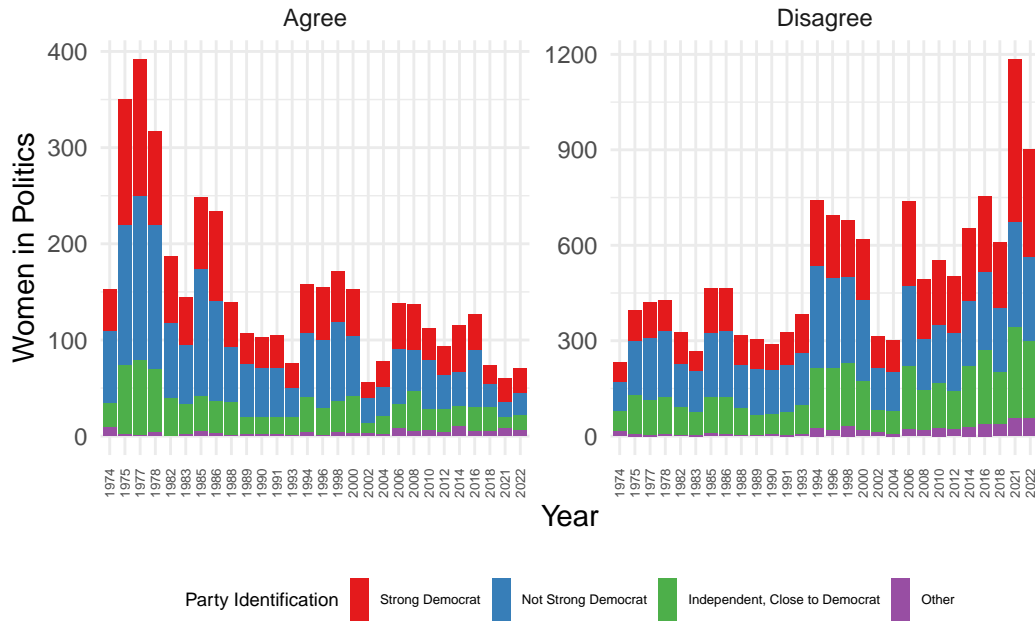
While there is often significant disagreement between liberals, conservatives, and sometimes moderates in American politics, it is noteworthy that moderates generally hold “middle of the road views” on the women in politics question (Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner 2012).

## 5.2 Perceptions of Women in Politics by Party Identification

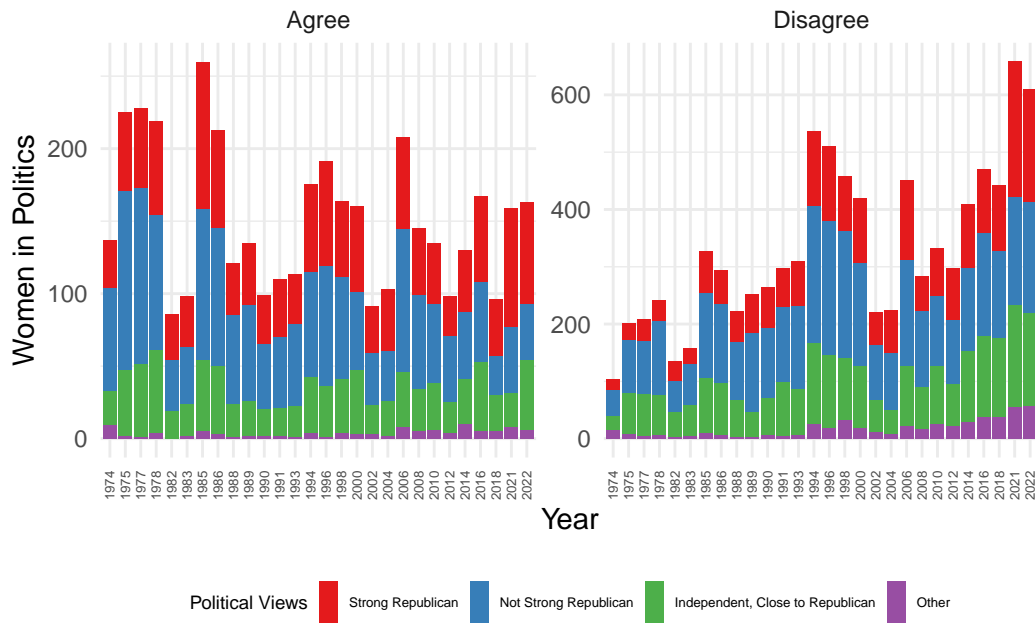
Despite assumptions and previous research, the data illustrates that perceptions of the emotional viability of women to serve in politics matches political party stances (Democrat and Republican) on the matter, but the results are not as negative and that public is more supportive of women running for elected office than anticipated (see Table 5 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) (Center for 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) (Center for American Women and Politics 2023).

Table 5 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 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 6, 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).



(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

### 5.3 Limitations

Asking people about their political views, potential party affiliation, and social issues such as the role of women in politics 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, to avoid perceived social judgement and present the best version of themselves (Claassen and Ryan 2016; Holman 2023; Stauffer and O’Brien 2018). Social desirability bias could be impacting the quality and quantity of 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 relation to respondents' gender. 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 connection to 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 and 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).

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