

When Are Women More Effective Lawmakers Than Men?

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Previous scholarship has demonstrated that female lawmakers differ from their male counterparts by engaging more fully in consensus-building activities. We argue that this behavioral difference does not serve women equally well in all institutional settings. Contentious and partisan activities of male lawmakers may help them outperform women when in a polarized majority party. However, in the minority party, while men may choose to obstruct and delay, women continue to strive to build coalitions and bring about new policies. We find strong evidence that minority party women in the U.S. House of Representatives are better able to keep their sponsored bills alive through later stages of the legislative process than are minority party men, across the 93rd–110th Congresses (1973–2008). The opposite is true for majority party women, however, who counterbalance this lack of later success by introducing more legislation. Moreover, while the legislative style of minority party women has served them well consistently across the past four decades, majority party women have become less effective as Congress has become more polarized.

The 1992 congressional elections marked a watershed moment in American electoral history, with far and away the largest influx of women elected into the U.S. Congress. With 48 women elected to the House, and six women sitting in the Senate, 1992 was denoted the “Year of the Woman,” with the implicit promise for the 103rd Congress to produce dramatic policy changes. Were these expectations realistic? Would these new lawmakers be able to effectively turn their ideas and policy goals into the law of the land?

Unfortunately, such a question is difficult to answer, in no small part due to the puzzle of conflicting scholarly evidence about the overall effectiveness of female legislators. Some studies show women to be more effective than their male counterparts (e.g., Anzia and Berry 2011; Volden and Wiseman 2011), some less effective (e.g.,

Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2011), and some equally effective (e.g., Jeydel and Taylor 2003), both within Congress and across U.S. state legislatures (e.g., Bratton and Haynie 1999; Saint-Germain 1989). We argue that such conflicting evidence can be resolved by uniting two disparate literatures on legislative politics. One, focused on gender and legislative behavior, has shown that men and women behave differently in legislative settings. The second focuses on legislative institutions, such as committees and parties, illustrating their importance in bringing about new public policies. Put simply, we argue that the goals and typical legislative styles of women serve them extraordinarily well in some institutional settings, and less well in others.

Based on prior research, gender is clearly important in explaining political behavior and legislative

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interactions. Numerous studies (e.g., Burrell 1994; Sanbonmatsu 2003; Swers 2002) have demonstrated that female legislators are more likely than their male counterparts to sponsor “women’s issues” bills such as education, child care, and family health legislation. Additional gender differences have been found everywhere from leadership styles (e.g., Rosenthal 1998), to the nature of constituency service (e.g., Thomas 1992), to communication patterns in hearings (e.g., Kathlene 1994). Taken together, this literature collectively points to discernible differences between the behaviors of men and women in Congress. Having identified these baseline differences, however, this line of research has only tentatively taken the next step to focus on how these behaviors map into legislative outcomes.

Separate from the literature on women and politics, much legislative scholarship has analyzed how the institutional features of Congress (e.g., rules, parties, committees) influence law making. These theories and perspectives are all, purportedly, gender neutral. Yet, in light of the research noted above, one wonders whether this inattention to gender differences has limited our understanding of legislative politics and policymaking. For example, although we know that female lawmakers tend to be more collaborative than their male counterparts (e.g., Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Rinehart 1991; Rosenthal 1998; Thomas 1994), it is not clear whether these more collaborative legislative styles might help or hinder women as they navigate the legislative waters to set the agenda, build coalitions, and broker deals necessary to create laws. More generally, given that Congress (and the U.S. House, in particular) conducts its business according to well-specified rules and procedures, it is unclear what impact, if any, the underlying behavioral differences between men and women have for overall legislative effectiveness.

One possibility is that these behavioral differences across men and women do not matter much at all for policymaking. Instead, perhaps the electoral environment that female candidates face helps explain their differential effectiveness (i.e., Anzia and Berry 2011). Given that women tend to face more electoral competitors (Lawless and Pearson 2008) and higher-quality challengers (Milyo and Schosberg 2000), while receiving less support from party organizations (Sanbonmatsu 2006), and needing to work harder to secure campaign funds (Jenkins 2007), it may be the case that those female candidates who succeed in being elected are of exceptionally high quality (and higher quality than the average male candidate).

While electoral and legislative politics are undeniably intertwined, we suggest that the behavioral differences between men and women found across numerous legislatures are not solely an artifact of electoral challenges.

And we argue that these differences allow women to be more effective than men given the right configuration of law-making institutions. Specifically, we draw upon the substantial literature suggesting that female lawmakers tend to be more consensus oriented and collaborative, which could facilitate the movement of their agenda items through the law-making process. Any given political strategy, however, will work better in some settings than in others; and to this end, we note the significant structural differences that exist between members of the majority and the minority party. Majority party members can advance their agendas without substantial coalition building across party lines; they often can elevate partisan politics above policy and still prevail. In contrast, to achieve legislative success, minority party members must maintain a focus on policy over political advantage, must reach across the aisle, and must work extremely hard to gain policy expertise and political acumen.

This latter set of skills and behaviors nicely matches those ascribed to female legislators throughout the literature on gender and politics. We therefore argue that women are likely to be more effective than their male counterparts when in the minority party in Congress. Such legislative success should manifest itself in the advancement of their sponsored legislation further through the law-making process. Such a result, however, should differ for members of the majority party. Here, especially in recent polarized Congresses, cross-party policy coalitions should be of little use, leaving women no substantially more effective than men.

In the following sections, we develop this argument in hypotheses that build upon the existing literature about the legislative styles of female lawmakers and test these hypotheses by drawing on a dataset of all 138,246 bills introduced by men and women in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973 to 2008. In so doing, we explicitly define legislative effectiveness as the advancement of a member’s agenda items through the legislative process and into law. While such an approach provides the broad outlines of when women are more effective lawmakers than men, it is also limited in a variety of ways.

First, in looking at the progression of bills through Congress, we are studying only one form of the “effectiveness” of lawmakers. Members of Congress advance their own interests and those of their constituents not only through their sponsored legislation, but also through a complex set of activities ranging from managing large staffs, to negotiating behind-the-scenes deals, to fundraising, to bringing home projects to the district. Gender differences across this range of activities also merit study, but such an enterprise is beyond the scope of our present research. Second, while we uncover broad

patterns that may result from consensus-building efforts, we are not currently able to establish the exact mechanisms that produce our aggregate patterns. As such, future work is needed to clarify the manner in which consensus-building activities influence law making, which remain as conjectures here.

Third, we recognize the inherent limits of the quantitative approach taken in this study. More specifically, some scholars (e.g., Duerst-Lahti 2002a, 2002b; Hawkesworth 2003; Kenney 1996) suggest that the subtleties of conversational dynamics, norms of masculinity, and gendering of institutions may all be better understood by employing various qualitative methods. Our study seeks to complement such qualitative work, and, taken together, these different methodologies can present the most complete picture of the role that women play within legislative institutions. Finally, since our data are focused solely on the U.S. House of Representatives, we cannot speak to gender and effectiveness in the U.S. Senate, in state legislatures, or in international political bodies. Our hope is that the arguments and findings presented here can be applied more broadly in future work.

Theoretical Considerations

In its simplest form, our argument is that behavioral differences between male and female legislators interact with legislative institutions to lead to differential patterns of law-making effectiveness between men and women. To make this argument more concrete, we limit our study to the institution of majority and minority parties in Congress and to one purported behavioral difference between men and women in legislatures: their tendency to engage in consensus building and collaboration.¹

In motivating our analysis, we draw upon a substantial literature showing significant differences between the political approaches employed by male and female lawmakers, with women being more collaborative and consensual, and men being more individualistic and competitive (e.g., Duerst-Lahti 2002a; Jeydel and Taylor 2003; Rinehart 1991; Rosenthal 1998; Thomas 1994).² For ex-

ample, in their study of state legislatures, Carey, Niemi, and Powell (1998) find that women report spending more time engaging in building within-party and across-party coalitions than men. The authors conclude that women are “more committed team players than men” and that “gender differences are more pronounced with respect to activities that involve communication and compromise” (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998, 101). Laboratory experiments (e.g., Kennedy 2003) repeatedly show female subjects to be more likely to desire universalistic outcomes and group cooperation, whereas male subjects tend to prefer competitive solutions. The source of these behavioral differences across gender is open for debate and goes beyond the scope of this study. That said, scholarship in the state politics literature suggests that the collaborative nature of female lawmakers might be (at least partially) the product of socialization, as women have sought to develop coping mechanisms to help them overcome various institutional barriers that they face. For example, as revealed by an open-ended survey of state-level lawmakers, approximately one-quarter of all women expressed concerns about discrimination (Thomas 2005, 252). The presence of such barriers might facilitate a particular legislative style among women, helping explain gender differences found in previous studies.

Regardless of their sources, these “feminized” (Jewell and Whicker 1994) strategies of cooperation, conciliation, and consensus building have been theorized as excluding or hindering female legislators in national politics (Duerst-Lahti 2002b). Yet it seems plausible that these leadership approaches may be valuable under certain political circumstances, and we argue that such links depend conditionally on legislative institutions. In particular, one important consideration regarding whether women’s collaborative tendencies translate into effective law making is the majority or minority party status of lawmakers. We focus here on party status because of the crucial role that party plays in Congress (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 2005), and we argue that the effects of consensus-building activities may not be party neutral.

More specifically, unless one’s main goal is to bring about policy change, a minority party member’s best strategy may just be to obstruct and help ensure policy gridlock (e.g., Brady and Volden 2006). Minority party men often choose this path, while women may be more driven to bring about social change and more willing to make compromises to facilitate such change. Furthermore, the propensity of women to be “better at working across the aisle” (Alvarez 2000) may serve mainly to enhance the effectiveness of women in the minority party. Since members of the majority party could exclude the minority party rather than collaborate and cooperate,

¹In so doing, we wish neither to suggest parties as the only relevant differentiating institution nor to argue that the scope of collaborative effort is the most important gender difference. On this latter point, many scholars have identified the ways that women might exert higher effort (e.g., Carroll 2002; Lawless and Fox 2005; Reingold 1996) and maintain greater focus on substantive policy matters (e.g., Thomas, Herrick, and Braunstein 2002) in their law-making efforts than their male counterparts.

²Reingold’s (1996) analysis of the Arizona and California state legislatures, however, provides a counterpoint to this argument, as she finds that male and female legislators report themselves as engaging in substantively similar legislative strategies.

consensus building may not necessarily advantage female members in the majority. The propensity of female lawmakers “to bring people together” (Carroll 2002, 61) may be less rewarded under such circumstances.

It is important to reiterate that we are not arguing that only women in the minority party engage in consensus-building activities. Rather, our claim is that women, generally more so than men, engage in these types of strategies and that the impact of these strategies will be more substantively significant for minority party women than majority party women due to the fact that majority party women are already part of a natural majority coalition. Drawing on these arguments, we arrive at our first hypothesis.

Party Differences Hypothesis: In the minority party, women are more effective than men. In the majority party, women and men are likely to be equally effective.

The Party Differences Hypothesis suggests that the relative legislative effectiveness of men and women differs by party status. However, such differences may be assuaged or exacerbated by the nature of party conflict in the Congress. For instance, for decades up through the 1980s, the majority Democratic Party was internally divided between conservative Southern Democrats and more liberal Northern Democrats. Democratic women who were able to bridge this divide may have been more effective than their male counterparts, just as they would be in the minority party. In contrast, the higher degree of polarization between Democrats and Republicans in recent decades (e.g., McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006) may strongly reinforce the logic of the Party Differences Hypothesis. In fact, under “conditional party government” (Aldrich and Rohde 2001), with parties polarized against one another but internally united, one might expect bipartisan consensus building to give way to strong majority party rule, which could favor more typically male strategies. Such conditions lead to a second hypothesis.

Polarized Party Differences Hypothesis: With less polarized parties, both majority and minority party women will be more effective than their male counterparts. With more polarized parties, this effect will continue for minority party women but diminish for majority party women.

In addition to these aggregate effects, the logic above indicates that we should be able to detect these gender differences through specific patterns across various stages of the legislative process. In particular, once a bill is introduced into the House, further movement depends on institutional positioning and leadership strategies. And,

as noted above, we argue that potentially effective strategies for members of the majority party are quite distinct from effective strategies for those in the minority. Specifically, while “leadership styles that lean more toward consensus building may be less efficient and not as conducive to moving an issue through the legislative process” (Kathlene 1995, 187) for majority party members, they are crucial for members in the minority party. Since members of Congress are responsible for coalition building, it is essential for minority party members to cooperate and work across the aisle to build enough support to push their bills through the pipeline. If consensus building is essential for minority party women and relatively ineffective for majority party women, these different effects should be most evident in later stages, such as in committee, on the floor, and in the enactment into law.

Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis: Women in the minority party will experience increased effectiveness in comparison to their male counterparts in stages that depend on consensus building. Women in the majority party will be indistinguishable from their male counterparts in their success in later legislative stages.

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

Empirical Approach

To investigate the above hypotheses, we rely upon a multi-stage method of analysis that identifies the success of each member’s sponsored legislation at each stage of the legislative process, from bill introduction to enactment into law.³ Such an approach allows us to determine whether women are generally more effective than their male counterparts, as well as from which stage of the legislative process, and for which party, this enhanced effectiveness is

³Here we are therefore setting aside cosponsorship and amendment activities, as well as nonbill-related activities and other potential determinants of effectiveness for members of Congress. An examination of cosponsorship data, not reported here due to space considerations, shows a significant positive gap in the number of cosponsors gained by minority party women over minority party men, with a smaller and less significant gap for majority party women. Auxiliary analysis in Table S3 of the supplemental appendix replicates the analysis in Models 1 and 2 of Table 1, when accounting for legislators’ amendment activity.

derived. We build upon previous work by Volden and Wiseman (2010), in which they develop a Legislative Effectiveness Score (LES) for each lawmaker based on how many bills he or she introduces, as well as how many of those bills receive action in committee, pass out of committee and receive action on the floor of the House, pass the House, and ultimately become law.⁴

Unlike a typical “hit-rate” analysis that looks only at bill conversions from introductions into law, this type of analysis can account for whether there are gender differences in the quantity of bills introduced and how successful the bills are throughout key intermediate stages of the legislative process. While our analysis implicitly assumes that members of Congress want the bills that they introduce to advance further in the legislative process (and ultimately signed into law), we concede that legislators could also be introducing bills for position-taking, strategic, or other idiosyncratic reasons. That said, we feel comfortable assuming that the vast majority of legislation is sponsored with *sincere* motives (i.e., wanting to see the legislation advance in some capacity), rather than, or in conjunction with, these other considerations.

In addition to tracking each member’s bill successes, the LES method also accounts for bills’ varying levels of substantive importance. For example, dedicating a statue can arguably be achieved with less legislative effort than passing the Family and Medical Leave Act. To account for such variation, Volden and Wiseman (2010) categorize all bills as being commemorative/symbolic, substantive, or substantively significant.⁵ After classifying each bill into one of these three categories, the LES is calculated for each member i in each Congress t , as follows:

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

⁴For a more thorough description of this process, see Volden and Wiseman (2010).

⁵A bill is deemed substantively significant if it had been the subject of an end-of-the-year write-up in the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. A bill was deemed commemorative/symbolic if it satisfied any one of several criteria such as providing for a renaming, commemoration, and so on. All other bills were categorized as substantive.

where the five large terms represent the member’s fraction of bills (1) introduced, (2) receiving action in committee, (3) receiving action beyond committee, (4) passing the House, and (5) becoming law, relative to all N legislators. Within each of these five terms, commemorative bills are weighted by $\alpha = 1$, substantive bills by $\beta = 5$, and substantively significant by $\gamma = 10$ in line with Volden and Wiseman’s earlier analysis. The overall weighting of $N/5$ normalizes the average LES to take a value of 1 in each Congress.

Several features of this construction are worth noting. First, because of the substantial differences in the number of bills that are introduced (138,246 bills over our time period) and the number of bills that advance to further stages (5,907 becoming law, for example), this operationalization gives much greater weight to members who are more successful in later stages of the process (e.g., having a bill pass the House or become law) than earlier stages of the process (e.g., bill introduction or action in committee). Thus, if women are introducing more bills than their male counterparts but are less successful at getting their bills passed into law, we should see this reflected in their LES values.

In order to test our hypotheses, we begin by estimating a series of OLS regressions where the dependent variable is a member’s Legislative Effectiveness Score. Since our hypotheses concern the difference between women in the majority and minority parties, we include indicator variables for whether a legislator is Female, and either a Majority Party Female or a Minority Party Female.⁶ A Lagged Effectiveness Score is incorporated into the analysis to control for the fact that members are expected to have consistent interest and innate abilities from one Congress to the next.⁷ Seniority and its squared value measure the number of terms that the member has served in Congress to capture the institutional influence that might be acquired by more senior members (and the squared value allows the seniority effect to taper off). While seniority is relevant to any investigation of legislative effectiveness, it is especially important to consider in the context of gender and politics, as it was not until the 109th Congress that women made up more than 15% of

⁶See the appendix for a description of all of the independent variables.

⁷An alternative way to account for legislators’ (relatively) consistent interest and innate abilities across time would be to estimate a fixed effects model (by legislator). The high correlation between a legislator’s gender, party status, and other variables renders estimating such a model impractical as several variables of interest (most notably, *Female*) are dropped due to multicollinearity. As shown in the supplemental appendix, the results presented in Table 1 are robust to the exclusion of lagged LES.

the House. Therefore, many female legislators have fewer years of experience than their male counterparts, which may be related to their abilities to be effective lawmakers.

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

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

Distance from Median captures the absolute distance between the member and the chamber median on the DW-NOMINATE ideological scale (Poole and Rosenthal 1997) to control for the possibility of more centrist members offering proposals that are more likely to find their way into law. Since previous research has demonstrated that female lawmakers are more liberal than their male counterparts, especially (until recently) when in the Republican Party (e.g., Burrell 1994; Frederick 2010; Swers 2005), this variable is particularly relevant to our study.⁸

Members’ personal characteristics, including African American and Latino, are incorporated because they have been shown to be important in earlier studies of effectiveness (e.g., Griffin and Keane 2011; Rocca and Sanchez

2008). Size of Congressional Delegation within the member’s state captures the possibility of natural coalitions among members from the same state. Vote Share and its square are included to allow for the possibility that members from safe seats can dedicate greater time and effort to internal legislative effectiveness rather than external electioneering and to allow this effect to be nonlinear.

Results

Our Party Differences Hypothesis relies on the idea that women in the minority party benefit from consensus-building efforts; however, these efforts are less valuable for members of the majority party. Thus, to the extent that women in general are more effective in the LES measure as a whole, we expect women in the minority party to be driving such an overall finding. In order to test this hypothesis, we conduct two multivariate analyses with a member’s overall LES value as the dependent variable. In the first analysis, we include an independent variable for whether the member is female, which is meant to replicate Volden and Wiseman’s (2011) findings demonstrating that female lawmakers are generally more effective than their male counterparts, all else equal. The second analysis, however, moves beyond existing findings by controlling for whether the female legislator is in the majority or minority party.

As Model 1 of Table 1 demonstrates, female members do appear to be more effective than their male counterparts. In fact, being a female lawmaker translates into approximately a 10% increase in legislative effectiveness, given the mean LES value of 1.0 in each Congress.

Model 2, however, suggests that this overall finding about gender and effectiveness is driven mainly by women in the minority party. The coefficient for minority party female is positive, highly significant, and nearly double that for majority party women. Although the coefficient for majority party female fails to attain statistical significance, it is positive. Put into more concrete terms, when compared to the average member of their party, women in the minority are about 33% more effective, and women in the majority are about 5% more effective than their male counterparts, all else equal.⁹ These results lend support to our Party Differences Hypothesis; minority party women seem to be more effective than minority party men, while majority party women are not significantly more effective than their male counterparts.

⁸Upon controlling for ideology in this way, there are no further interactive differences between gender and ideology that explain legislative effectiveness.

⁹The relevant calculations for these percentages are based on the average Legislative Effectiveness Score among minority party members of 0.404 and among majority party members of 1.451.

TABLE 1 Determinants of Legislative Effectiveness

	Model 1: Overall LES	Model 2: By Party Status	Model 3: 1970s & 1980s	Model 4: 1990s & 2000s
Female	0.107*** (0.039)			
Majority Party Female		0.076 (0.071)	0.105 (0.116)	0.001 (0.093)
Minority Party Female		0.135*** (0.034)	0.082* (0.044)	0.211*** (0.044)
Lagged Effectiveness Score	0.490*** (0.030)	0.490*** (0.030)	0.646*** (0.040)	0.375*** (0.034)
Seniority	0.057*** (0.015)	0.057*** (0.015)	0.076*** (0.021)	0.043** (0.015)
Seniority ²	−0.002* (0.001)	−0.002* (0.001)	−0.004*** (0.001)	0.0001 (0.001)
State Legislative Experience	−0.075 (0.058)	−0.076 (0.058)	−0.113 (0.088)	0.0002 (0.073)
State Legislative Experience × Legislative Professionalism	0.354* (0.184)	0.355* (0.184)	0.464 (0.302)	0.214 (0.199)
Majority Party	0.587*** (0.045)	0.592*** (0.046)	0.460*** (0.054)	0.718*** (0.069)
Majority Party Leadership	0.174 (0.142)	0.178 (0.143)	−0.174 (0.175)	0.267 (0.199)
Minority Party Leadership	−0.076 (0.064)	−0.076 (0.064)	−0.064 (0.075)	−0.088 (0.085)
Speaker	−0.576** (0.242)	−0.579** (0.246)	−0.981*** (0.190)	−0.706** (0.311)
Committee Chair	1.918*** (0.194)	1.916*** (0.194)	1.219*** (0.218)	2.420*** (0.280)
Power Committee	−0.226*** (0.037)	−0.226*** (0.037)	−0.190*** (0.047)	−0.247*** (0.049)
Distance from Median	−0.132 (0.088)	−0.134 (0.088)	0.264** (0.131)	−0.301** (0.135)
African American	−0.194** (0.077)	−0.195** (0.077)	−0.377*** (0.116)	−0.067 (0.076)
Latino	0.017 (0.076)	0.016 (0.076)	−0.0003 (0.143)	0.061 (0.085)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.00007 (0.002)	0.00005 (0.002)	−0.0004 (0.002)	−0.0002 (0.002)
Vote Share	0.030*** (0.011)	0.030*** (0.011)	0.013 (0.015)	0.032** (0.015)
Vote Share ²	−0.0002** (0.0001)	−0.0002** (0.0001)	−0.00007 (0.0001)	−0.0002* (0.0001)
Constant	−1.141*** (0.404)	−1.140*** (0.404)	−0.648 (0.540)	−1.160** (0.561)
N	6154	6154	2871	3283
Adjusted-R ²	0.55	0.55	0.61	0.52

Note: Results from ordinary least squares regressions. Robust standard errors in parentheses, observations clustered by member.

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

The Polarized Party Differences Hypothesis suggests that these findings should depend on the degree to which the two parties are polarized. Specifically, given our data, the 1970s and 1980s should generally show different patterns from the 1990s and 2000s. Models 3 and 4 in Table 1 replicate the analysis of Model 2, breaking the data into two congressional eras (1970s–80s and 1990s–2000s, respectively). In comparing across specifications, we see that the results are remarkably consistent for minority party women, who are significantly more effective than their male counterparts at moving bills through the legislative process. Although the coefficient on Majority Party Female in Model 3 is not statistically distinct from zero (given its large standard error), its size is on par with that for Minority Party Female. In the polarized era shown in Model 4, however, the Majority Party Female variable drops not only in statistical significance but also in substantive terms, to zero. Furthermore, auxiliary analysis reveals that the coefficients on Minority Party Female are statistically different from each other across eras, perhaps indicating that consensus building is even more valuable for minority party members in a more polarized era.¹⁰

This large-sample evidence comports nicely with numerous anecdotal accounts that point to how men and women behave differently upon moving from the majority party to the minority party, or vice versa. For example, consider Representatives Carolyn Maloney and Charles Schumer. Both served as Democrats from New York in the majority party in the 103rd House of Representatives. Both introduced legislation on war crimes, and both had their bills bottled up in the Subcommittee on International Law, Immigration, and Refugees within the House Committee on the Judiciary. In the 104th Congress, as minority party members under Republican control, Schumer chose to no longer even sponsor legislation on this topic, whereas Maloney built up support across party lines, helped navigate her War Crimes Disclosure Act through three different committees, and won its passage through the House and eventually into law. Across numerous other examples, highly partisan male lawmakers appear to take on a very different role when in the minority than in the majority. For instance, lists of the 10 minority party members with the *lowest* Legislative Effectiveness Scores in each Congress during the era of Democratic control feature Newt Gingrich, Tom DeLay,

John Boehner, and Dick Cheney, all of whom went on to enjoy future positions of leadership in Congress or the executive branch.

In addition to the aggregate analyses of Table 1, we also estimated regression models, using the specification for Model 2 for each Congress separately.¹¹ The regression coefficients for Majority Party Female and Minority Party Female over time are plotted in Figure 1. It is important to recognize that this figure represents the *relative* effectiveness of women as compared to men. Taking the 104th Congress as an example, the LES gap of 0.8 between minority party women and majority party women is driven by the fact that women in the minority party are more effective than their male counterparts (with a 0.4 coefficient), whereas women in the majority are less effective than their male counterparts (with a coefficient of about –0.4). As can be seen, compared to their male counterparts, women in the minority party have fared much better in every Congress other than the 93rd.¹²

The findings for majority party women are much more uneven but appear to be divided into two eras. Prior to the 100th Congress (1987–88), majority party women outperformed majority party men in all but one Congress. However, in the 11 Congresses since 1987, majority party women have been *less* effective than their male counterparts in eight, whereas minority party women have maintained their positive relative effectiveness. These results hold regardless of which party is in the majority, as the Democrats and Republicans held the House for comparable lengths of time throughout this period. The results of Figure 1 and Table 1 thus support the Polarized Party Differences Hypothesis.

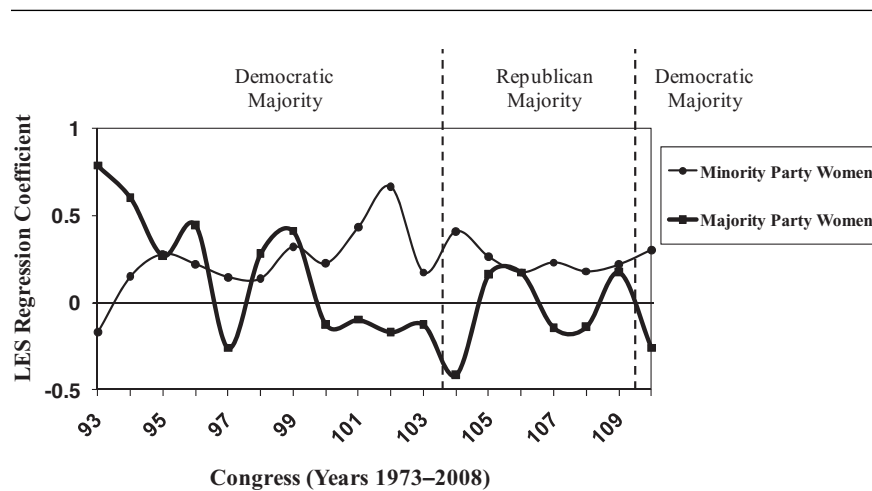
As striking as these findings may be, it is difficult to fully understand gender and legislative effectiveness by only looking at these general analyses. Additional insight can be gleaned from unpacking effectiveness into the various stages of the legislative process. As noted previously, our dataset allows us to investigate effectiveness across five stages: bill introduction, action in committee, action beyond committee, passage of the House, and becoming law. Taking these stages into consideration, the Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis suggests that only women in the minority will be more successful than men at getting their bills through the legislative pipeline. In order to investigate this possibility, we conduct five separate OLS regressions, one for each stage of the law-making

¹⁰In estimating a pooled OLS model with interaction variables for each era (which is econometrically identical to the separate analyses in Models 3 and 4), we can reject the null hypothesis that *Minority Party Female* (1970s & 1980s) = *Minority Party Female* (1990s & 2000s) (p -value = 0.03). We cannot, however, reject the null hypothesis that *Majority Party Female* (1970s & 1980s) = *Majority Party Female* (1990s & 2000s) (p -value = 0.47).

¹¹For the results depicted in Figure 1, the regressions did not include lagged dependent variables, as here we are looking at snapshots of the data rather than at cross-sectional time series.

¹²These results are at least weakly significant ($p < 0.10$, one-tailed) in all Congresses except the 97th, 98th, and 103rd.

FIGURE 1 Relative Effectiveness of Majority and Minority Party Women



process.¹³ In each analysis, the dependent variable is the number of bills reaching that stage, and the independent variables include majority party women, minority party women, and all controls considered above.¹⁴

Model 5 in Table 2 demonstrates how gender and party status impact legislative effectiveness at the bill introduction stage. Interestingly, we see that, after controlling for other relevant factors, women in both the majority and minority party introduce more bills than do their male counterparts. Such findings are consistent with the argument that women develop larger legislative portfolios because they represent not only their electoral constituents but also the interests of women more generally. Note, however, that this effect is only statistically significant for women in the majority party. In substantive terms, women in the majority party introduce 3.3 more bills than majority party men, which translates into about 17% more introductions on average by majority party women, when compared to majority party men. On the other hand, women in the minority party introduce only 0.75 more bills than their male counterparts, all else equal, an increase that translates into approximately 5% more bills being introduced by minority party women than by minority party men.

¹³Analyzing these data with negative binomial regressions (e.g., Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, and Sinclair-Chapman 2003) and exploring the role of outliers both yield similar patterns to those reported here. For ease of interpretation and presentation, we continue to rely upon the ordinary least squares approach.

¹⁴Notice that here bills are not weighted by their commemorative or substantive nature or by any measure of their substantive significance. Running the analyses upon excluding commemorative bills yields similar results.

Moving to the implications of the Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis, Models 6–9 illustrate how gender and party status impact effectiveness in the stages after bill introduction. With the exception of the number of bills receiving action in committee, the coefficients for minority party female are positive and statistically significant in every stage of the legislative process. For example, the coefficient of 0.204 for Action Beyond Committee indicates that for every five minority party women, there will be one more bill that reaches the floor of the House. A similar pattern also holds for whether a bill passes the House and for whether a bill becomes law. In relative terms, the average minority party woman has a 28% greater volume of sponsored legislation reaching the floor of the House and 33% more laws resulting from her sponsored legislation than does the typical minority party man.¹⁵

These findings contrast with those of Lazarus and Steigerwalt (2011), who uncover evidence of women being generally less effective than men. One likely reason for these differences is that Lazarus and Steigerwalt's empirical specification is substantively equivalent to conventional hit-rate assessments of effectiveness. As such, given that majority party women introduce so much more legislation than men, they appear less effective subsequently; however, they still ultimately produce approximately the same number of laws, as shown in our analysis. Building on this point, the insignificant coefficients for stages after bill introductions for majority party women are telling. Because they introduce substantially more bills than their

¹⁵On average, minority party members have 0.659 pieces of legislation reach the floor in any Congress and 0.328 sponsored bills become law.

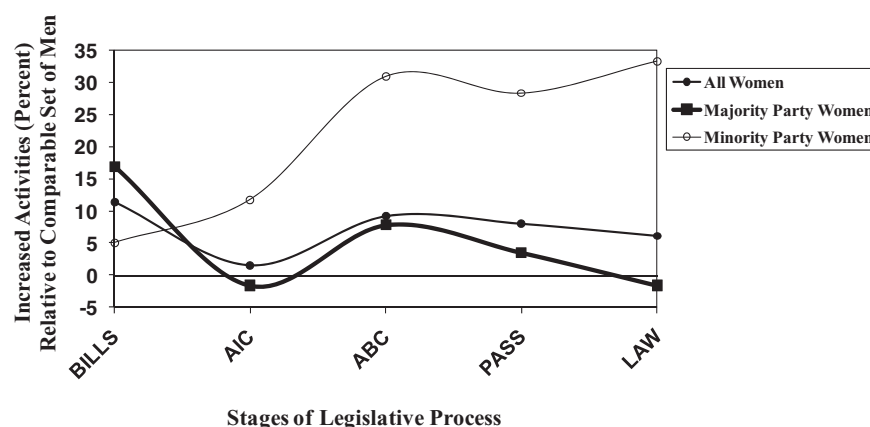
TABLE 2 Determinants of Bill Progression in Congress

	Model 5: Bill Introductions	Model 6: Action in Committee	Model 7: Action Beyond Committee	Model 8: Pass House	Model 9: Become Law
Majority Party Female	3.249** (1.647)	-0.052 (0.216)	0.124 (0.194)	0.074 (0.180)	-0.017 (0.132)
Minority Party Female	0.750 (1.226)	0.122 (0.124)	0.204** (0.091)	0.160** (0.077)	0.109** (0.048)
Seniority	1.908*** (0.239)	0.372*** (0.044)	0.253*** (0.033)	0.183*** (0.029)	0.061*** (0.019)
Seniority ²	-0.083*** (0.015)	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.003* (0.002)	0.0003 (0.001)
State Legislative Experience	-2.720** (1.333)	-0.336 (0.212)	-0.190 (0.156)	-0.111 (0.129)	-0.083 (0.072)
State Legislative Experience × Legislative Professionalism	2.655 (3.804)	1.211* (0.681)	0.865* (0.511)	0.614 (0.414)	0.369* (0.215)
Majority Party	2.530** (1.118)	1.777*** (0.166)	1.505*** (0.108)	1.176*** (0.092)	0.494*** (0.048)
Majority Party Leadership	-5.024*** (1.863)	0.198 (0.442)	0.510 (0.385)	0.584* (0.348)	0.506** (0.250)
Minority Party Leadership	-3.146 (2.242)	-0.531*** (0.192)	-0.362** (0.161)	-0.280** (0.142)	-0.127 (0.081)
Speaker	-15.475*** (2.061)	-3.635*** (0.480)	-2.284*** (0.457)	-1.709*** (0.430)	-0.612* (0.328)
Committee Chair	6.842*** (2.045)	4.731*** (0.541)	5.294*** (0.487)	4.063*** (0.378)	2.171*** (0.244)
Power Committee	-2.438** (1.000)	-1.306*** (0.144)	-0.950*** (0.108)	-0.716*** (0.088)	-0.206*** (0.053)
Distance from Median	-3.068 (2.445)	-0.131 (0.298)	0.031 (0.219)	-0.041 (0.186)	-0.156 (0.098)
African American	-5.482*** (1.452)	-0.679*** (0.184)	-0.484*** (0.155)	-0.384*** (0.133)	-0.187** (0.076)
Latino	-6.086*** (1.785)	-0.025 (0.316)	0.263 (0.224)	0.257 (0.202)	0.130 (0.126)
Size of Congressional Delegation	0.049 (0.035)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)
Vote Share	0.437** (0.202)	0.058** (0.026)	0.049** (0.020)	0.039** (0.018)	0.030*** (0.011)
Vote Share ²	-0.003* (0.001)	-0.0004** (0.0002)	-0.0003** (0.0001)	-0.0003** (0.0001)	-0.002*** (0.0001)
Constant	-5.650 (7.324)	-2.142** (0.918)	-1.977*** (0.732)	-1.539** (0.643)	-0.996*** (0.387)
N	7641	7641	7641	7641	7641
Adjusted-R ²	0.07	0.31	0.38	0.35	0.27

Note: Results from ordinary least squares regressions. Robust standard errors in parentheses, observations clustered by member.

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

FIGURE 2 Legislative Advancement Activities of Women, Relative to Men



male counterparts, the insignificant findings across Models 6–9 indicate that majority party women are experiencing less success than their male counterparts at every stage after bill introduction. For example, although majority party women average more than three additional bill introductions than their male counterparts, this advantage is completely erased within the committee system.

Figure 2 illustrates these findings by stage, relative to the activities of men, based on the regressions reported in Table 2. For example, on the left of the figure, majority party women are shown to introduce 17% more bills than majority party men. This difference is 5% for minority party women, leading to an average of 11% more introductions for women than for men. Moving to the right, we see the advantage of majority party women over men completely eliminated by the Action in Committee stage, ultimately leaving these women with about the same number of laws as majority party men. In contrast, minority party women become more and more effective throughout the law-making process, culminating in 33% more laws produced than minority party men. That the overall effect for women hovers around the 5–10% range explains the initial finding in Model 1 of an approximate 10% higher effectiveness for women over men, all else equal.

Taken as a whole, these findings support the Legislative Advancement Differences Hypothesis. Although female legislators in both the majority and minority party are introducing more legislation, only minority party women are more successful than their male counterparts in pushing their bills through the legislative pipeline. In fact, majority party women are significantly *less* likely

than their male counterparts to get their sponsored bills signed into law. Only women in the minority party are finding success at stages that depend on consensus building. These findings lend support to the notion that the ability to work across the aisle is an important legislative asset for minority party members wishing to advance their policy agendas.

Putting aside these findings regarding direct gender differences, it is important to note several auxiliary results from our regression analyses. First, it is clearly the case that members of the majority party, *ceteris paribus*, are generally more effective than members of the minority party. In comparing across the results in Tables 1 and 2, we see that majority party members generally have higher LESs than members of the minority, and majority party members experience greater success at every stage of the legislative process than members of the minority. That said, the Speaker is consistently *less* effective than the average legislator; this makes sense in the context of our analysis given that the Speaker of the House traditionally introduces few, if any, bills. Likewise, the negative coefficient on power committee is not entirely surprising as much of the high-priority legislation that goes through these committees is introduced by the committee chairs.

Building on this point, we see that being a committee chair significantly increases a member's effectiveness, both overall and throughout every stage of the legislative process. For example, committee chairs average nearly seven more bill introductions, five more bills receiving action beyond committee, and two more bills being signed into law (some of which may result

from chairs sponsoring bills on behalf of their committees). Likewise, seniority is also positively associated with legislative effectiveness; an increase from one to five terms served in Congress translates into approximately seven additional bills introduced and one additional bill receiving action beyond committee. In considering these latter two factors (committee leadership and seniority), we note that their impacts on effectiveness are particularly relevant for women. Given that women have not yet attained comparable levels of seniority to their male counterparts, nor been awarded equivalent numbers of committee chairs, they appear to have been structurally disadvantaged. Their enhanced number of introductions and subsequent legislative success in the minority party only partially offsets these limitations.

Other significant independent variables also are relevant for the fate of the legislation of women. Members who have served in professional state legislatures are more highly effective, especially in the number of laws they ultimately produce. African Americans are somewhat less effective, arising mainly from the narrower set of bills they introduce initially. And the nonlinear effect of the Vote Share and Vote Share Squared variables indicates that the most effective members on average come from districts that are neither highly contested nor perfectly safe, giving members the leeway and the incentives to advance their legislative priorities. Controlling for all of these factors is important, as each differentially speaks to the backgrounds and experiences of women in Congress.

Alternative Hypotheses Regarding the Legislative Effectiveness of Women

While our analysis suggests that female legislators' effectiveness follows, largely, from their collaborative styles, it is still quite possible that our results are closely related to electoral forces, as suggested by Anzia and Berry (2011). If, as they contend, the average effectiveness of any female legislator is greater than her male counterparts due to biases faced in the electoral environment, it is also possible that in any given election, national partisan tides might make it relatively easier to be elected from one party over the other. In particular, women elected into the majority party, having not been subjected to a particularly hostile electoral environment, might be generally less effective than women who were elected into the minority. If this were true, our results might still be quite consistent with an electoral story, rather than the intralegislative story that we advance. While it is difficult to discriminate between these perspectives given the data used here, one

potential way to engage this possibility is to focus on the electoral tide that ushered in the 103rd Congress and to look specifically at the subset of legislators who were first elected into the 103rd Congress and then reelected into the 104th Congress.

For those Democrats who were freshmen in the 103rd Congress (and subsequently survived to be sophomores in the 104th Congress), the average LES score of Democratic freshman women (0.246) was actually slightly lower than that of Democratic freshman men (0.263) (in the 103rd Congress), but the difference was not statistically different. When the Democrats lost control of the House in the 104th Congress, however, we see that those second-term Democratic women who survived increased their average LES (0.479), while second-term Democratic men declined in effectiveness (0.257), for a weakly significant difference ($p = 0.07$, one-tailed). Hence, at least for the case of the electoral tide that ushered in the Year of the Woman, female legislators' patterns of effectiveness more closely match the hypotheses advanced here than one wherein electoral differences alone explain effectiveness across the majority and minority parties.¹⁶

A second alternative hypothesis involves over-time congressional changes due to the growing number of women in Congress (e.g., Bratton 2005) rather than increasing polarization. Following the lead of previous research, we examined whether there was a significant increase in the legislative effectiveness of women after they reached the "critical" (i.e., Kanter 1977) threshold of 15% of the chamber, which occurred in the 109th Congress. We also analyzed whether female legislative effectiveness increased along with the percentage of women in the chamber. In neither analysis did we find support for the presumed relationship between the number of women in Congress and legislative effectiveness.¹⁷

Third, drawing on the intriguing work of Carroll (2001) and Swers (2005), we also investigated whether Republican versus Democrat party differences, rather than majority versus minority party differences, account for the differing effectiveness of men and women. As demonstrated in Table S1 of the supplemental appendix, our general findings regarding women are not specific to

¹⁶The relatively low numbers of women serving in Congress prevent us from engaging in more systematic exploration of this hypothesis, but one would hope that scholars would embrace such inquiry in their analyses of state legislatures, where the larger numbers of female politicians might facilitate such large-sample tests.

¹⁷Of course, a plausible interpretation of these findings is that women have not yet obtained a critical mass in Congress, and hence, our null findings would be entirely consistent with the critical mass thesis.

a woman's party, but rather to whether her party controls the House. Moreover, which party (i.e., Republicans or Democrats) controls the House has no bearing on the majority-minority party distinctions that we identify in Table 1.

Implications and Future Directions

While much scholarship has demonstrated gender-based behavioral differences in legislatures, relatively less work has engaged whether, and how, these differences ultimately translate into public policies. We investigate the conditions under which women in Congress are more effective at moving their sponsored bills through the law-making process than their male counterparts, addressing how these patterns of effectiveness are related to an interaction between the important institutional structure of majority party status and the consensus-building activities that have been specifically attributed to female lawmakers. In analyzing the fates of all bills introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973 to 2008, we uncover aggregate findings that suggest that engaging in consensus building can help female lawmakers achieve increased legislative effectiveness, but only under certain circumstances. In particular, while minority party women consistently outperform minority party men, the same is not true for majority party women.

We also found that the effectiveness of men and women varies by stage of the legislative process. Although women in the minority party introduce slightly more bills than their male counterparts, their true effectiveness is seen in their ability to navigate these bills onto the floor of the House and into law. On the other hand, women in the majority party are less successful at these later stages of the process, starting even with a relative inability to receive hearings and markups of their bills in committee. Despite introducing significantly more bills than their male counterparts, majority party women have nothing more to show for these efforts than majority party men in committee hearings, floor activities, bill passage, or laws enacted.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the key to female lawmakers' effectiveness lies at the intersection of behavioral traits (i.e., being consensus oriented) and institutional positioning (i.e., being in the minority party, where such traits are necessary and valuable). This work thus complements and sheds light on earlier findings in the literature. Consistent with earlier works, there do seem to be strong institutional hurdles for women to overcome

in advancing their legislative agendas in Congress. Also consistent with past research, women seem to adopt clear strategies to overcome these obstacles. Finally, perhaps the inconsistent results previously uncovered in the literature of women being less, more, or equally effective in some state legislatures and some sessions of Congress arise from variance across these settings in the institutional factors that translate the behavioral differences between men and women into differing legislative accomplishments. As such, we provide an institutions-based explanation for understanding the effectiveness of women in Congress. To the extent that women generally pursue different policy agendas than men, our research stands as an essential step toward understanding whether increasing numbers of women in legislatures will yield significantly different policy outcomes than would occur in their absence.

While our study therefore builds upon previous work and provides some key pieces to the puzzle regarding the legislative effectiveness of women, some significant holes remain in the overall picture. We conclude by highlighting three remaining questions as fruitful lines of future research. First, one might ask whether more direct and substantial evidence could be generated that captures the consensus-building activities of women in Congress. Although we found strong support for the hypotheses that were related to consensus building, our focus was not on establishing the validity of this underlying behavioral claim, which is worthy of greater consideration.

Second, why are women so unsuccessful in promoting their sponsored bills in committee? In examining patterns of effectiveness across stages of the legislative process, it is startling how frequently the bills introduced by women (especially majority party women) receive no attention in committees whatsoever. Further studies of decisions in congressional committees regarding which bills to advance, and the nature of committee hearings and markups, with a specific focus on issues of gender (e.g., Kathlene 1994), would be most welcome.

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

APPENDIX Data Sources, Definitions, and Descriptive Statistics

Independent Variables	Description	Mean	Std. Dev.
Majority Women	Equals “1” if member is a majority party woman	0.042	0.201
Minority Women	Equals “1” if member is a minority party woman	0.045	0.208
Seniority ^a	Number of terms served by member in Congress	5.205	3.964
State Legislative Experience ^a	Equals “1” if member served in state legislature	0.487	0.500
State Legislative Professionalism ^b	Squire’s index of state professionalism relative to Congress	0.142	0.177
Majority Party	Equals “1” if member is in the majority party	0.569	0.495
Majority Party Leadership ^a	Equals “1” if member is in majority party leadership	0.016	0.125
Minority Party Leadership ^a	Equals “1” if member is in minority party leadership	0.017	0.131
Speaker ^a	Equals “1” if member is Speaker of the House	0.002	0.042
Committee Chair ^c	Equals “1” if member is a committee chair	0.050	0.218
Power Committee ^c	Equals “1” if member serves on Rules, Appropriations, or Ways and Means	0.251	0.434
Distance from Median ^d	Member <i>i</i> ’s DW-NOMINATE score – Median member’s DW-NOMINATE score	0.353	0.223
African American ^a	Equals “1” if member is African American	0.065	0.246
Latino ^a	Equals “1” if member is Latino/Latina	0.035	0.185
Size of Congressional Delegation ^e	Number of districts in state congressional delegation	18.35	13.99
Vote Share ^a	Percentage of vote received in previous election	68.53	13.89

Data sources:^aConstructed by authors based on *Almanac of American Politics*, various years.^bConstructed by authors based on updates to Squire (1992).^cConstructed by authors based on Nelson (1992) and Stewart and Woon (2005).^dConstructed by authors from DW-NOMINATE scores provided by Keith Poole.^eConstructed by authors.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

- Differences by Party Affiliation or Party Control?
- Robustness to Exclusion of Lagged Dependent Variable
- Exploring the Effect of Amendment Activities
- **Table S1:** Partisan Determinants of Women's Effectiveness?
- **Table S2:** Determinants of Legislative Effectiveness (Excluding Lagged LES)
- **Table S3:** Determinants of Legislative Effectiveness (Controlling for Amendment Activity)