

# Gender Bias in the Media? An Examination of Local Television News Coverage of Male and Female House Candidates

LESLEY LAVERY

*Macalester College*

*Several decades of scholarship suggest that by covering male and female candidates differently, the news media may influence the success of female candidates for higher office. I employ a content analysis to assess gender differences in the local television news coverage of 172 U.S. House candidates in the nation's top 50 media markets in 2002. The results of the study suggest that female candidates for the U.S. House were covered with the same frequency as male candidates, and received equitable issue-based and personal coverage.*

**Keywords:** Media and Politics, Gender Bias, Television Election News, Female Candidates, House of Representatives, United States, Political Communications, Local News Coverage, Media Framing, Media Bias Theory, Voter Perception.

## **Related Articles:**

Bode, Leticia, and Valerie M. Hennings. 2012. "Mixed Signals? Gender and the Media's Coverage of the 2008 Vice Presidential Candidates."

*Politics & Policy* 40 (2): 221-257.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2012.00350.x/abstract>

Jalalzai, Farida. 2006. "Women Candidates and the Media: 1992-2000 Elections." *Politics & Policy* 34 (3): 606-633.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2006.00030.x/abstract>

## **Related Media:**

**Film Clip:** Women's Media Center. 2008. "Sexism Sells—But We're Not Buying It." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-IrhRSwF9U>

**Datasets:** Center for American Women and Politics. 2013.

<http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>

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*Varias décadas de investigación sugieren que al dar cobertura diferente a candidatas masculinos y femeninos, los medios noticiosos podrían influir en el éxito de las candidatas para ocupar un cargo público. Empleo un análisis de contenido para evaluar las diferencias de género en la cobertura de noticias de televisoras locales de los candidatos a la 172 Casa de Representantes en los 50 mercados de medios superiores de la nación en 2002. Los resultados del estudio sugieren que las candidatas para la Casa de Representantes fueron cubiertas con la misma frecuencia que los candidatos y que recibieron cobertura equitativa tanto respecto a los asuntos que trataron como respecto a su persona.*

Today, women hold 18 percent of Senate and Congressional seats, and run 10 percent of state governments.<sup>1</sup> Although female representation in higher office has doubled in the past two decades, recent research indicates that women's numbers in government seem to have reached a plateau (Thomas and Schroedel 2007; see also Figure 1). And current figures suggest a clear lack of representational parity.

Since the 1980s, when research on female candidates first began to flourish due to the rising numbers of female candidates and officeholders, scholars have developed numerous theories to account for the dearth of women in office without precluding limited advances in representation or the more recently documented plateau. Proponents of media bias theory, the focus of this analysis, suggest that the press “plays an integral role in the campaign by framing, shaping, ignoring or presenting the candidates to the public” (Falk 2008, 2). If the media frame stories on male and female candidates differently, or play up certain issues or characteristics more for one gender of candidate than another, the electorate may internalize the bias inherent in these messages. This may be of particular consequence for women if the media focus on female candidates' viability or suggest that female candidates lack ability to deal with masculine issues.<sup>2</sup>

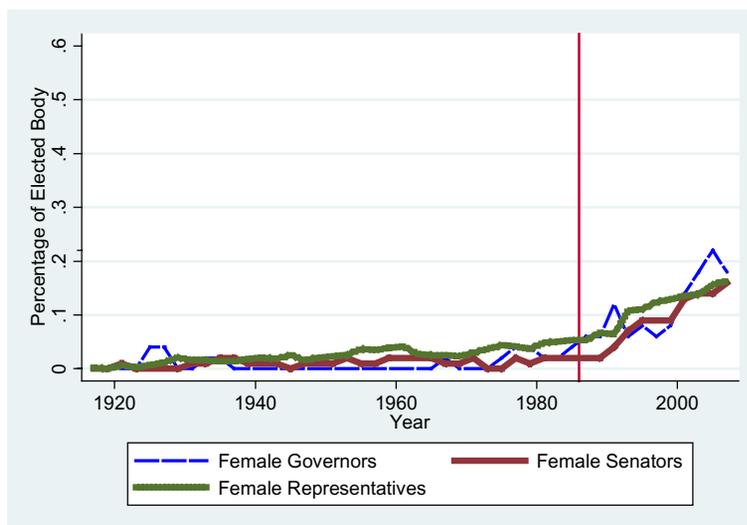
Although we can learn a great deal from the existing body of media bias scholarship, findings to date stand on conclusions drawn from small, often-dated, content analyses of a single medium (newspaper coverage) and a limited number of office types (Senate, gubernatorial, or presidential and vice presidential campaigns).<sup>3</sup> This article expands the landscape of previous

<sup>1</sup> Twenty women serve in the U.S. Senate and 78 women in the House of Representatives. In 2013, five women served as governors. Nine women served as governor in 2008 (Center for American Women and Politics 2013).

<sup>2</sup> In contrast, if the media work to provide balanced coverage, reporting the issues as candidates frame them when they publicly present themselves, voters can make fair-minded choices.

<sup>3</sup> Many of these studies include the entire set of female candidates for a specified office in a given year or over several election cycles (Kahn 1994, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). This sample is still small in comparison to a content analysis of a large random sample of stories on all male

**Figure 1.**  
**Female Representation in Higher Office 1917-2007**



*Source:* Center for American Women in Politics; Eagleton Institute of Politics, 2008.

*Note:* Line at 1986 indicates initial research on gender bias in the media.

research employing a content analysis of a large random sample of local television news coverage of U.S. House candidates and campaigns to broaden our understanding of the relationships among news medium, office type, and bias.

Analysis of stories run via the medium through which the majority of Americans at the time of data collection gathered their news adds to our understanding of the relationship between medium and bias in coverage (Lear Center Local News Archive 2008). Today, many Americans turn to cable networks and the Internet, as well as local television broadcasts and newspapers, for their campaign coverage. One might assume that the content of campaign coverage differs little by medium. But recent research suggests otherwise (Bode and Hennings 2012). We know that, in absolute terms, newspapers tend to include more stories on state-level elections than local television news programs—as producers rise to meet the viewing demands of different and often broader constituencies, which often span a variety of Congressional districts (Goldenberg and Traugott 1987; Jalalzai 2006). But we

and female major party candidates in the top 50 media markets in the country. More recent studies of presidential and vice presidential races rely on a very limited candidate field (Bode and Hennings 2012; Falk 2008; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005).

do not know whether the reduced airtime that candidates receive via local television networks contains similar content to longer stories in the printed press. And we know even less about how other aspects of this medium may influence voters' candidate perceptions. Because any differences in coverage by medium may be of particular influence to the segment of voters most drawn to one particular form of media over another, learning more about candidate coverage in a variety of media is of extreme importance in understanding various constituencies' relationships with and support for candidates.

An exploration of coverage of candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives supplements and updates understanding of bias by office type. Previous work on Senatorial, gubernatorial, presidential, and vice presidential candidates tells us that job characteristics and prestige may interact with voters' perceptions of women's ability to govern. Yet scholars have failed to explore media coverage of House members, the national representatives most likely to hold close constituent connections. This would be of little consequence if we expected coverage of House candidates not to differ from coverage of candidates for higher office, but we have few empirics upon which to base such an expectation. Rather, we might expect difference in coverage for a variety of reasons. There is a well-documented lack of coverage for House candidates when compared with their peers running for offices of higher prestige and broader constituency or governing authority (Westlye 1991). Whether less absolute coverage of this office type translates to equal, but minimal, coverage for male and female candidates is an open question and may be of great consequence given what we know about candidate ambition and the potential for differential coverage to impact the pool of future candidates (Fox and Lawless 2004). A position in the U.S. House ranks low on the totem pole of higher office holding, but House membership can provide members with wide exposure and name recognition, key resources for future pursuits of higher office. And factors that color the campaign or office holding experience of House candidates may send cues to potential candidates, changing the pool of future candidates both up and down the political ladder (Fox and Lawless 2004).

The data used for this article—which was designed to examine coverage in an alternative medium, focused on campaigns and candidates in an unexplored office, and modeled with previously unaccounted for substantive and methodological controls—indicate that differences in reporting on male and female House candidates in 2002 are minimal when compared with previous research.<sup>4</sup> However, comparisons to previous work are made with caution as the medium (local television news) and focus (House candidates) of this article depart from earlier scholarship in the field.

<sup>4</sup>These data are newer but are now nearly a decade old. To the author's knowledge, no more recent local television campaign capture is available.

### Literature Review

Since the 1980s, scholars have developed and tested a number of theories to account for the dearth of women in political office without explaining away advances in female representation or ignoring the recently documented plateau in female office holding. Some scholars suggest that women are less politically ambitious or driven to pursue public life than their male peers (Deber 1982; Fox and Lawless 2003, 2004). Others argue that women lack access to key political resources—party mobilization, support, grooming, financial backing, and familiarity with voters—necessary to compete in the political world (Epstein 1981; Gertzog 1979; Sanbonmatsu 2006). Several studies hint that women may be more likely than men to run in “hopeless” races or those where their party believes their defeat is assured (Bernstein 1986; Bullock and Heys 1972; Gertzog and Simard, 1982; Sanbonmatsu 2006). And a large body of work demonstrates instances and ways where women are victim to sex stereotyping by voters (Arceneaux 2001; Boles and Durio 1980, 1981; Bowman 1984; Fox and Oxley 2003; Gordon and Miller 2005; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Koch 2002; Lawless 2004; Leeper 1991; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Sapiro 1982). A related literature compares media coverage of male and female candidates, and demonstrates instances of media bias—differential coverage that often works to female candidates’ disadvantage (Bystrom, Robertson, and Banwart 2001; DeVitt 1999; Falk 2008; Kahn 1992, 1994, 1996, 2003; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Robertson *et al.* 2002).<sup>5</sup> Media bias theory is the focus of the present article.

Fifteen years ago, several studies were published linking media bias to the lack of women in higher office (Kahn 1994, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). Content analyses of newspaper coverage were conducted to test for differences in the coverage of small samples of male and female U.S. Senate candidates and later candidates for statewide office.<sup>6</sup> Documented differences were then linked to sex stereotypes in the electorate, which were shown to influence the success of female candidates (Kahn 1994, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991).<sup>7</sup>

Early work in this field investigated two broad coverage patterns: gender differences in the *amount* of coverage candidates received and differences in the *substance* of that coverage. Findings suggested that women received less total coverage in newspapers than men and that the coverage they received was substantively different. Coverage of female candidates was more negatively

<sup>5</sup> Other theories attribute the lack of female representation to gendered childhood socialization, parenting expectations, and the masculinization of politics.

<sup>6</sup> The sample in these studies includes all female candidates for the specified office. The word “small” is used for comparative purposes.

<sup>7</sup> Kahn (1996) later conducted a similar analysis of female gubernatorial candidates over the same time period.

focused on viability and fund-raising potential, less focused on substantive issues, and more likely to focus on “female” issues (such as education, health care, and women’s rights) and traits (physical appearance, compassion) even when candidates made efforts in campaign advertisements and other communication with voters to emphasize policy and character strength in areas stereotypically perceived as weaknesses (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991).

Since the early 1990s, there has been a fair amount of additional research on gender bias in the media. Several books and articles, especially those based on content analyses of newspaper coverage of campaigns in the more recent past, suggest a reduction in media bias. In an analysis of state newspaper coverage of eleven Senate and gubernatorial races in 1994, Smith (1997) found that reporters had begun to treat men and women more equally—providing roughly the same quantity and quality of coverage for male and female candidates. Bystrom, Robertson, and Banwart (2001) demonstrated in an analysis of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial primaries that women received more total coverage than men and that the quality of that coverage was becoming more equitable. Robertson and others’ (2002) recent analysis of general election coverage of Senate and gubernatorial races also found that, in general, stereotypical coverage of female candidates was becoming less common (cf., Jalalzai 2006). And in a recent synthesis of literature, Woodall and Fridkin (2007) document Americans’ increasing comfort with women in higher office.<sup>8</sup>

But amidst evidence that media bias has been reduced are signs that it persists in certain aspects of campaign coverage. In an analysis of 1998 gubernatorial candidates, DeVitt (1999) found that women still received less issue-related coverage than men as a proportion of total coverage. And in the same study from which they concluded that the overall quality of newspaper coverage was equalizing, Robertson and others (2002) found that women were still receiving “gendered” personal coverage focused on their roles as wives and mothers.<sup>9</sup> Those who study women running for executive office have also found that the press focuses disproportionately on female candidates’ appearance and dress, and that the tone of coverage differs for male and female candidates (Falk 2008; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Poll respondents report greater comfort with congresswomen than the idea of a female president.

<sup>9</sup> Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes (2003)—using survey responses from 1996 and 1998 U.S. House and state legislative candidates—argue that women gain a strategic advantage when they run “as women” stressing issues that voters associate favorably with female candidates and targeting female voters. If this strategy is purposive across race type and time, this may be reflected in media reviews of the campaign.

<sup>10</sup> See Bode and Hennings (2012) for a multiple medium analysis of the quantity and substance of 2008 vice presidential candidate coverage. The authors find differences in volume of coverage (Governor Palin receives more), substance of coverage (roughly reflecting gender-based

Conflicting results in recent research and indications that the office and medium of analysis matter motivate this addition to the research.

### Research Design

This article expands upon existing findings on gender bias in the media in several ways. First, content analysis of local television news, rather than newspapers, is employed. This allows measurement of media bias in the news medium relied on by most Americans in 2002 (Lear Center Local News Archive 2008), a medium likely to speak to many of the changes in media consumption patterns of the last decade and add nuance to an understanding of gender-biased reporting based heavily on analyses of newspaper coverage.<sup>11</sup>

Second, this article's reliance on election news coverage from the country's top 50 media markets affords a much larger sample than previous analyses (Bystrom, Robertson, and Banwart 2001; DeVitt 1999; Kahn 1992, 1994, 1996; Smith 1997). Data span coverage of stories reaching over two-thirds of all American viewers, and include information on 172 House candidates, 133 men and 39 women representing 95 races—three between two female candidates, 35 between a male and female candidate, and 57 where both candidates are men.<sup>12</sup> The dataset includes 55 incumbents, 15 of whom are female.<sup>13</sup> There are 86 Democrats, 19 of whom are female. This large, diverse sample allows

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stereotypes), and medium (with differences in volume and substance of coverage across newspapers, television, and blogs).

<sup>11</sup> A recent report from the Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2012) suggests that local news may now be surpassed by cable news as a primary source of campaign information. This report highlights how local news as well as other traditional news sources, such as newspapers, have declined since 2000. While this new evidence does not call into question the importance of this medium in the 2002 election cycle, there is a lack of evidence that television is where most people get *their news about House races*. Mondak (1995) argues that because media markets do not correspond closely with House districts, newspapers are the top source for these contests. Others show that television can have an effect on electoral outcomes, but note that the effect is strongest when media markets closely corresponding to district boundaries (Prinz 1995).

<sup>12</sup> The number of races is more than half the number of candidates as some candidates in the data-set were the sole candidates in their race covered on their local television news (i.e., their opponents did not receive any coverage).

<sup>13</sup> Several of the most influential studies of media bias toward female candidates (Jalalzai 2006; Kahn 1992, 1994, 1996) are informed by small (although inclusive) samples of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races stratified by race type (gender and status of candidate [challenger, incumbent, open]) and competitiveness. This stratification strategy yields 14 possible race categories, and for each of these categories, where possible, researchers randomly selected three races for analysis. This methodological strategy allows researchers to explore races that fit these particular categories in great detail. However, inferences based on such small samples may be driven by the idiosyncrasies of the candidates and races selected, and therefore generalizations to a larger population should be made with caution. The strategy employed here relies on a much larger sample of candidates and stories that allow for more sophisticated statistical analyses and greater confidence that any trends detected are more truly representative of systematic differences in coverage.

incumbency, and political party—a variable often overlooked in previous research—as well as interactions between gender, and these factors to be accounted for systematically.<sup>14</sup>

Third, as mentioned in the introduction, previous scholarship suggests that media bias differs by context; office matters (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). For example, Kahn (1994) finds that while the media cover the candidacies of female U.S. Senate and gubernatorial candidates differently than their male counterparts, in both race types women receive less issue attention than their male colleagues, while in senatorial races women are also disadvantaged in the quantity and viability of coverage. And studies of presidential and vice presidential candidates Dole and Palin document differences in the volume (Dole receiving less and Palin more than male peers) and substance of coverage, roughly reflecting gender stereotypes (Bode and Hennings 2012; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005). Ironically, scholars neglect analyses of U.S. House candidacies. This omission is consequential because media bias in House races matters for female House candidates' progressive ambition and desire to climb the political ladder (Canon 1990; Falk 2008; Rohde 1979; Schlesinger 1966). A position in the House offers candidates an opportunity to connect with and advocate for constituents gaining name recognition and familiarity crucial in candidacy for higher office (Goldenberg and Traugott 1987; Mann and Wolfinger 1993). And research on nascent political ambition suggests that bias in coverage at this level of office may also influence the desire of women in future candidate pools to enter the political arena (Fox and Lawless 2005).<sup>15</sup>

### Hypotheses

The literature on media bias suggests that differences between the amount and substance of coverage of male and female candidacies are likely waning, although important discrepancies that disfavor females may remain and be more important in some contexts than others. Given previous research and the specific focus of this article—House races—I offer the following hypotheses regarding local television coverage of male and female House candidates.

<sup>14</sup> Although previous analyses often accounted for competitiveness of the race, incumbency and competitiveness of the race are highly correlated. Because incumbency is a characteristic of an individual candidate (like gender and party), results based on this variable are reported for all models. However, results are substantively similar regardless of whether incumbency or competitiveness of the race are included, and results simultaneously accounting for both factors are available from the author upon request.

<sup>15</sup> Fox and Lawless (2005, 652) find that “a general sense of efficacy as a candidate, as gauged by self-perceived qualifications, exerts the greatest relative impact on nascent ambition.” The extent that media influence this gauge of self-efficacy and highlight women's minority status in the electoral arena can be of great consequence.

Research conducted on male and female candidates for a variety of political offices suggests that women running for office receive comparatively less overall coverage than their male peers—although there are documented instances where women receive greater coverage due to the novelty of their candidacy (Kahn 1994, 160). Therefore, I expect that if differences in coverage between male and female candidates are present in this medium, at this time, female candidates for the U.S. House will receive comparatively less than their male peers.<sup>16</sup>

Hypothesis 1: Quantity of coverage: To the extent that coverage volume differs, female House candidates will receive less media attention than their male peers.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the potential differences in the amount of coverage that candidates may receive, the literature suggests that we may detect differences in the substance of that coverage, with coverage of female candidates more likely to focus on viability or performance potential, center around “female” issues, and fixate on personal character or issues. We know that not all gender stereotypes are detected in all races. To the extent that they are apparent, differences in coverage of male and female House candidates should most resemble differences in coverage between male and female U.S. Senate candidates as these officeholders share a national scope of responsibility (and often at least partially overlapping constituencies).<sup>18</sup>

Hypothesis 2: Substance of coverage: Gender stereotypes unfavorable to female candidates may emerge when comparing candidates in three substantive areas: viability, issue, and personal coverage. Like female U.S. Senate candidates, female House candidates may receive more viability and personal coverage and less issue coverage on “masculine” issues than their male peers.

An analysis of coverage in this new medium and office will add an important datapoint to the ongoing attempt to tease out *when* and *how* gender stereotypes in electoral media coverage persist.

<sup>16</sup> We know that House candidates are likely to receive less coverage than their peers running for Senate or president due to the comparative size and scope of their constituency and the relative power that each office entails, although to date we know little about potential differences in this limited coverage.

<sup>17</sup> In comparison to Senate or presidential elections, news coverage (television or newspaper) in U.S. House races is generally scant (Clarke and Evans 1983; Goldenberg and Traugott 1984). House races are different than Senate races because House races are much more homogenous (Westlye 1991); the vast majority of these races are noncompetitive affairs between a safe incumbent and a weak challenger. In these lopsided races especially, news coverage is likely to be minimal, and therefore differences in coverage may be hard to detect.

<sup>18</sup> Although differences in coverage of male and female House candidates may be driven more by the fact that these candidates are more likely than their peers running for U.S. Senate to represent small, homogenous populations with more specific political wants and needs. I attempt to control for the influence of some of these factors by employing media market fixed effects in empirical models.

### Data and Methods

The data reported here are drawn from a content analysis of local news stations conducted by the University of Wisconsin NewsLab in 2002.<sup>19</sup> The NewsLab began a systematic study of the content and effectiveness of local television news by recording and examining the highest rated, early evening (4:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.) and late evening (9:00 p.m.-11:30 p.m.) local news broadcasts from 122 stations during the seven weeks prior to that year's midterm elections (September 18, 2002 through November 4, 2002). Stations were randomly selected from a sampling of 200 stations—the four major news affiliates in each of the country's top 50 media markets (ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC). These markets encompass over two-thirds of television viewers in the nation.

Coders from the University of Wisconsin NewsLab watched each newscast and “clipped” each election story.<sup>20</sup> Coders then determined which race was the focus of the story (presidential, House, Senate, gubernatorial), the candidates mentioned, the primary substantive focus of the story, and other topics or issues referred to in the story.<sup>21</sup>

The NewsLab dataset was not designed to study gender bias in the news nor maintained by the author. Therefore, all analysis conducted relies on questions designed for NewsLab's more general purposes.<sup>22</sup> Although this makes direct

<sup>19</sup> The NewsLab also collected local news stories in 2004 and 2006, but only the 2002 collection provides a representative sample of the highest rated news broadcasts in the country's largest 50 markets, enabling conclusions to be made about the content of programming viewed by the greatest number of people in two-thirds of the United States (University of Wisconsin NewsLab 2007). See <http://dept.polisci.wisc.edu/uwnewsrab/>

<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this study, an election story is defined to be about (1) a single race or election wherever possible, or (2) a voting issue/problem, ballot initiative, or bond issue. Local news coverage within a broadcast does not always start with one race and end with another; some stations intertwine coverage of different races (University of Wisconsin NewsLab 2007). When both candidates are mentioned in a given broadcast, efforts are made to time and code mentions of each candidate separately so that in these multicandidate stories it is apparent when one candidate receives say 90 percent of coverage, to his or her competitor's 10 percent. However, the topical and issue focus is coded at the story level. Video of all broadcasts was captured through DVD recorders placed with field workers assigned to capture news in each of the 50 media markets. Field workers recorded two days of news onto a disk and then sent the DVDs back to the University of Wisconsin NewsLab over the course of the project. NewsLab employees then viewed each newscast and clipped out election news by digitizing election coverage as individual stories.

<sup>21</sup> Because NewsLab was not designed specifically for this study, no information on news reporters' gender, whether candidates made personal appearances for a broadcast, or the tone of each news segment is available.

<sup>22</sup> NewsLab staff generated kappa scores to assess the intercoder reliability statistics for several key variables, and these scores fell within acceptable bounds (kappa = .59-.85). A kappa score of 1 implies perfect agreement, which is rare. Scores ranging from .40 to .60 imply moderate agreement, .60-.80 good agreement, and .80-1.0 a very high degree of agreement (Altman 1991). A 5 percent sample was used (376 stories) (University of Wisconsin NewsLab 2007).

comparison to previous research on gender bias in the media impossible because Newslab (1) allows analysis of Americans' number one source of information at the time of data collection (Lear Center Local News Archive 2008); (2) affords a larger, more diverse, sample than those used in previous analyses (which enables exploration of the influence of important candidate characteristics such as party); and (3) permits the study of gender bias in reporting on House races, an unexplored yet crucial office given the constituency connection, understandings of how media bias differs across office type, and theories of nascent and progressive ambition, the conclusions drawn make a significant contribution to the literature, adding important nuance to our more general understanding of media bias.

### **Dependent Variables: Quantity and Substance of Coverage**

The variables used in this analysis are modeled after Kahn's analysis of gender bias in media reporting on Senate races in the 1980s (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). Like Kahn, I attempt to measure the differences in the *quantity* and *substance* of coverage of male and female candidates. However, some modifications were made in measuring the amount of coverage that candidates receive due to the mode of analysis (here, the focus is on television rather than newspaper coverage). And adjustments were also made to the viability and personal characteristics indicators due to data collection limitations.<sup>23</sup>

Table 1 lists each of the dependent variables employed. Quantity of coverage received by male and female candidates is captured by *total duration in seconds*, which indicates the total amount of local news coverage received by each candidate and each race.<sup>24</sup> Remaining indicators are designed to account for differences in the substance of coverage received by male and female candidates.

The *viability composite* is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether this coverage focused on candidate strategy (does the story focus on the tactics of a candidate, party, or interest group, and talk more about the "game" or "style" of politics and elections than substance or issues?), political advertising (does the story analyze a candidate or interest group ad for the claims it makes or its use of imagery?),<sup>25</sup> polling (is the story about a poll?), fund-raising (is the story about fund-raising?), and/or the horse race (was the story primarily concerned

<sup>23</sup> Previous scholars have coded for mentions of viability that pertain to specific candidates. The measure used in the present analysis only accounts for whether or not viability-related issues—coder-identified mentions of the horse race, strategy, ad watch, polling, or funding—are mentioned in each story analyzed.

<sup>24</sup> Each story begins when a reporter first mentions a candidate or race, and concludes when the reporter's coverage shifts to a new topic.

<sup>25</sup> Comments made by candidates, their opponents, or an interest group may bring additional attention to viability issues and prime voters—as the creators of these ads often intend—to consider a candidate's governing potential.

**Table 1. Dependent Variables**

Variable Name	Variable Type
Total duration in seconds	Continuous
Viability composite	Dichotomous
Horse race	Dichotomous
Strategy	Dichotomous
Ad watch	Dichotomous
Polling	Dichotomous
Funding	Dichotomous
Issue coverage	Dichotomous
“Female” issue coverage	Dichotomous
“Male” issue coverage	Dichotomous
Personal characteristics	Dichotomous
Scandal	Dichotomous

*Notes:* Dichotomous variables are coded for whether or not each topic was discussed in each news story. The total duration of the story is a continuous variable measured in seconds.

with which candidate is ahead or behind in a race?).<sup>26</sup> Farrar-Myers’ (2007) chapter on candidate viability justifies the combined use of these variables for a general assessment of viability.<sup>27</sup> But as Table 1 indicates, each of the dichotomous measures used to create the viability composite is also employed independently. While the indicators used in this analyses allow comparisons to earlier findings (Jalalzai 2006; Kahn 1994) regarding the *amount* of coverage devoted to horse race coverage, it is impossible to take comparisons a step further and assess the influence of this increased coverage on candidates’ overall viability because, unlike earlier work, the coding scheme employed at Newslab does not capture the tone of this coverage or indicate specifically which candidate is ahead or behind in the polls. And while candidates receiving more funding or horse race coverage may be disadvantaged, it is also possible that additional airtime is devoted to painting candidates’ fund-raising efforts or status in the polls in a positive light, ultimately benefiting a candidacy.

*Issue coverage* is a dichotomous variable designed to indicate whether or not the story concentrates on an issue such as terrorism, taxes, or education.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See the Appendix for the specific coding of these variables. If even one of these viability issues was mentioned in a news story, the viability composite indicator takes on a value of 1.

<sup>27</sup> Farrar-Myers suggests that the concept of viability might best be understood as “the perception of a candidate’s chances of winning her party’s nomination” (Farrar-Myers 2007, 121). A variety of factors influence this perception: money, name recognition, network/support, campaign organization, backing of party, credibility on key issues, resume, political timing, political environment and mood, and desire for change. When taken together, a more complete assessment of a candidate’s viability is possible.

<sup>28</sup> See the Appendix for a list of possible issue themes.

*“Female” issue coverage* and *“male” issue coverage* are dichotomous variables designed to detect differences in reporting on “gendered” issues. Informed by Kahn’s (Kahn 1992, 1994, 1996; Kahn and Goldberger 1991) and Huddy and Terkildsen’s (1993a, 1993b) work, the “male” issue indicator in this article combines coverage of foreign policy, defense, gun control, globalization, jobs, and taxes. The “female” issue composite includes coverage of childcare, education, the environment, health care, social security, women’s health, and women and politics.<sup>29</sup> Regressions were run on each of these issue composites, both including and excluding abortion from the “female” issue set.<sup>30</sup>

*Personal characteristics* is a dichotomous variable that indicates whether or not a particular story focuses on a candidate’s childhood, family history, past substance abuse, or personality traits. As with viability coverage, we cannot assume that coverage of this nature is negative. However, we do know that stories on candidates’ families and attempts to balance home life with career are likely to be framed and interpreted quite differently depending on candidate gender (Aday and Devitt 2001; Falk 2008; Jamieson 1995). And reporting on hairstyle and pantsuit color choice is both more likely to occur and less likely to have positive consequences for female candidates (Bode and Hennings 2012; Devitt 1999; Falk 2008; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Kahn 1992, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Women’s Media Center 2008). In addition to coding whether or not each story focused on personal coverage, Newslab employees indicated whether or not the coverage of the story mentions a personal scandal.<sup>31</sup> This variable offers an additional underexplored data-point for analysis, potentially consequential for electoral outcomes. The questions used in coding these variables appear in the Appendix. Summary statistics, by gender, appear in Table 2.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> More recent research on media bias suggests that the electorate still considers the environment to be a female issue (Gordon and Miller 2005; Woodall and Fridkin 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Previous research suggests that voters link female candidates and abortion. In some research, abortion alone has been used as a “female issue” indicator (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Swers 2002). Here, analysis is conducted both with and without the abortion coverage indicator to ensure that one issue does not entirely drive results.

<sup>31</sup> “Personal coverage” and “scandal” analyses are presented separately so that coverage of scandal does not drive personal coverage results. Because this dataset was not designed for the current analysis, no data were collected on mentions of candidate dress or appearance, or the overall tone of coverage. Although such data would allow for more direct comparison with previous research, this omission does not preclude a valid analysis of gender bias in the media.

<sup>32</sup> Summary statistics are reported rather than cross-tabulations given that cross-tabulations are most useful for understanding the relationship between dichotomous categories. Cross-tabulations were calculated where appropriate to give a better sense of the composition of the sample: 30 percent of men in the sample are incumbent candidates compared with 38.5 percent of women. Of men in the sample, 50.4 percent are Democrats, as are 49.7 percent of women. Raw numbers for candidate composition are referenced earlier in this article.

**Table 2. Summary Statistics by Gender**

	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Incumbent	.300752	.460319	.384615	.492864
Democrat	.503759	.501876	.48718	.50637
Duration in seconds	31.29309	12.28216	31.31175	16.16031
Viability composite	.405704	.378354	.56316	.395293
Horse race	.059897	.123512	.0782	.189664
Strategy	.324716	.339948	.445972	.388601
Ad watch	.021091	.105484	.038988	.168321
Polling	.057224	.134425	.066235	.185743
Funding	.025047	.089525	.021815	.065243
Issue	.389343	.416626	.316907	.372463
Female issue	.444901	.397911	.383318	.376797
Male issue	.449872	.394187	.393396	.394407
Personal characteristics	.139359	.295468	.099654	.23667
Scandal	.054349	.173912	.010268	.037113

### Independent Variables

As should be clear from a description of the dependent variables used in the analyses, Newslab captures and reports data at the story level. In the models that follow, to present results most similar to existing analyses of candidate-based media bias, I report the results of regressions employing candidate characteristics with media market controls.<sup>33</sup> Alternative models focused on the characteristics of the race covered in each story lead to substantively similar conclusions and are available upon request from the author.

In the dataset used for analyses, the gender of each candidate was determined from candidate names, websites, and coverage in other mediums, and used to create an indicator variable for female (female = 1). Each candidate's party was then determined, again using candidate and major news websites, and used to create an indicator variable for Democrats

<sup>33</sup> One might imagine including both candidate level (gender, incumbency status, party) and race level (female in the race, competitiveness of the race) characteristics in a model; however, because many candidate characteristics correlate closely with characteristics of the race (female candidate and female in the race can both be accounted for in a model, but for obvious reasons would be highly collinear), including multiple related measures makes interpretation of each less certain and more complicated. For each of the dependent variables reported, I have also run models predicting the outcome based on race type (female in the race versus no female in the race) and competitiveness (the absolute value of the final margin of victory calculated by subtracting the Republican candidate vote total from his or her Democratic opponent's total). Although competitiveness of the race often reaches statistical significance in relation to the outcomes of interest, the relationship between the type of race (female in the race versus no female in the race) and each outcome suggests that gender operates no differently in models at this level of analysis.

(Democrat = 1).<sup>34</sup> A variable to indicate each candidate's incumbency status (Incumbent = 1) was employed.<sup>35</sup> Finally, important interactions between candidate gender and incumbency status and candidate gender and party membership were examined using indicators for each key interaction.

In all models, fixed effects for media markets were included to control for a variety of other factors—district size, number of districts in the media market, racial makeup of viewing population, region of the country—that might be hypothesized to influence the relationship between key variables of interest without exhausting the power of the model to detect such effects as would a strategy where all of these factors were employed independently. The fixed effect assumption is that the individual specific effect (the effect of each media market) is correlated with the independent variables, that is, candidate gender, incumbency status, and party may influence or be influenced by media market context. Media market effects are not presented in tables as they only have meaning in relation to one another.<sup>36</sup>

### Modeling

As noted, news stories are the unit of analysis, and each candidate may be the subject of multiple news stories. While this is not concerning in and of itself, it may result in dependence among stories concerning a particular candidate. If the dependence of stories is ignored, standard errors are underestimated, and as a result spuriously significant effects are more likely to be observed. Therefore, in each model, the independent variables of interest and media market indicators are regressed on the dependent variable, and errors are clustered by candidate.

The equation below was used to model gender differences in the quantity and substance of candidate coverage.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Coverage}_{ijk} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Female}_{jk} + \beta_2 \text{Incumbent}_{jk} + \beta_3 \text{Democrat}_{jk} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Female Incumbent}_{jk} + \beta_5 \text{Female Democrat}_{jk} \\ & + \gamma_1 \text{Media Market}_k + \varepsilon_{ijk} \end{aligned} \quad ^{37}$$

<sup>34</sup>Independents were omitted from this analysis. The inclusion of third-party candidates complicates the way in which this variable is used to capture partisan issue ownership. Differences in coverage may differ by gender simply because more female candidates are Democrats, or because Democrats and women “own” the same issues (although in this particular dataset there are more female Republican candidates).

<sup>35</sup>Competitiveness of the race was considered in another iteration of these models. Results do not differ in sign or significance, and are available from the author.

<sup>36</sup>Effects by media market are available by request from the author.

<sup>37</sup>The coverage characteristics *i* for candidate *j* in media market *k* are a function of candidate characteristics (female, Democrat, incumbent), a vector of media markets, and an error term.

To account for differences in the quantity of coverage, the duration of coverage in seconds is modeled as a function of candidate gender, incumbency status, party, interactions between gender and incumbency status and gender and party and indicators for each media market where coverage on this outcome is reported. These variables are similarly regressed on indicators of the substance of coverage.

## Results

### Quantity of Coverage

The amount of coverage that a candidate receives is related to voters' recognition of that candidate (Goldenberg and Traugott 1984, 1987). And name recognition is directly related to electoral success (Bartels 1987). Previous scholars have shown that differences in the amount of press coverage that candidates receive can be consequential; those who receive less free media attention may be less likely to win (Falk 2008; Kahn 1996).

When news coverage is examined at the candidate level, no gender differences in the amount of coverage are apparent. Female and male candidates receive comparable amounts of total coverage as do members of both parties and incumbents and their nonincumbent peers (Table 3).

Although 20 years ago female candidates may have received less media attention than other races and candidates, by 2002, in both local television news and newspapers (Bystrom *et al.* 2004), women were receiving equitable amounts of coverage.

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**Table 3. Quantity of Coverage Duration in Seconds**

	Candidate
Female	-3.09 2.546
Incumbent	-.776 1.561
Democrat	-.16 1.201
Female incumbent	1.271 3.379
Female Democrat	.457 3.406
Constant	<b>38.619</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	<b>2.6</b> .114

*Notes:* Bold numbers indicate a statistically significant result with  $p < .05$ .  
N = 752 stories.

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### Substance of Coverage

No significant gender differences in the quantity of candidate coverage were apparent in this analysis; however, the substance of this coverage may still differ and disadvantage women running for office. Previous research indicates the importance of three types of coverage: coverage of candidate viability, issue positions, and personal characteristics (Bystrom *et al.* 2004; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). In her analysis of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial candidates, Kahn (1996) shows that media focus on candidate viability leads voters to focus on viability and female candidates to suffer.<sup>38</sup> Media studies of presidential campaigns in the 1980s suggest that both television and newspaper reporters are more likely to focus on the “game” of politics (the viability of candidates) than substantive issues (Graber 1989; Patterson 1980; Robinson and Sheehan 1983). Gender stereotyping research (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a) finds that voters attribute certain character traits and policy strengths (compassion, warmth, education, health care, and social security) to women, and other character traits and policy strengths to men (tough, aggressive, military, foreign policy). Other research provides support that issue and personal coverage are related to one another and the success of female candidates (Bystrom *et al.* 2004; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991).<sup>39</sup>

### Viability Coverage

Iyengar and Kinder’s work has demonstrated that an emphasis on horse race coverage (used synonymously with viability coverage here and in Kahn’s work) may have electoral consequences (Abramowitz 1989; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Research on presidential priming suggests that negative viability coverage can influence voters’ assessments of candidate viability and in turn their vote choice (Bartels 1987; Brady and Johnston 1987). And therefore it stands to reason that if women receive increased negative attention regarding their viability and fund-raising efforts, their electoral chances may be altered (Burrell 1985; Lake 2005).

The data in this article indicate whether or not several viability-related issues are covered in each news story. Coders determined whether the coverage of a particular candidate focused on the horse race, strategy, political advertising, polling, or funding coverage.<sup>40</sup> Any one story could have a single focus (the

<sup>38</sup> Note that in addition to assessing the differences in the amount of horse race coverage, Kahn’s (1996) viability coding indicates which candidate was advantaged or disadvantaged by this coverage, while the coding used in the current analysis does not.

<sup>39</sup> Recent research by Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes (2003) indicates that women may actually gain a strategic advantage when they run “as women,” stressing issues that voters associate favorably with female candidates and targeting female voters.

<sup>40</sup> Detailed coding for each category is provided in the Appendix. The presence or absence of reporting on candidate viability was noted; however, the tone of this coverage or which candidate was favored or mentioned as ahead or behind in the polls was not.

horse race) or multiple foci (the horse race, strategy, and polling). Therefore, based on the existing body of research on candidate viability—Farrar-Myers (2007) offers a comprehensive review—and the limitations of this dataset, these specific measures of viability were combined to create a viability composite: if even one of these issues was the focus of a story, the viability composite indicator takes on a value of 1.<sup>41</sup> In addition to analyzing gender differences in overall viability coverage, differences in each of these viability measures were analyzed independently to determine which issues are most likely to receive differentially disproportionate attention.<sup>42</sup>

Analysis suggests no significant difference in overall viability coverage of male and female House candidates, although a gender difference in ad watch coverage nears statistical significance, indicating that nonincumbent, Republican, female candidates receive greater coverage related to their political advertisements than their peers (Table 4).<sup>43</sup> Also of potential interest are the results relating incumbency status, party and the interaction between gender and party, and coverage of candidates' fund-raising efforts. The incumbency and female Democrat variables near statistical significance, suggesting that male incumbents receive slightly less coverage for their fund-raising efforts than their female peers, and female Democrats slightly more coverage of these efforts than their male peers, respectively. The party indicator reaches statistical significance, suggesting that male Democrats receive greater fund-raising attention than their male Republican peers. Considering the pre- and postelection partisan balance of the House, this is not particularly surprising.

Electoral outcomes provide an additional datapoint suggestive of a trend toward less gender-biased campaign coverage—female House candidates in this sample were no less likely to win than male House candidates (19 out of 39 women won their races compared with 65 out of 133 men). However, the null findings reported here may reflect the fact that female candidates are no longer a novelty as they were when the majority of work on media bias emerged, or null findings may be due to overly blunt measures of viability coverage. Future work more attuned to the tone and directionality of this coverage may come to an alternative conclusion. I elaborate more on this possibility when I discuss avenues for future research.

<sup>41</sup> Note that some of the questions used for story coding ask whether a story is primarily about or focused on a particular topic, while others ask simply whether or not a topic is mentioned. A story could be “concentrated” on issues but also mention one of the viability indicators.

<sup>42</sup> Again, it should be noted that existing research suggests that *negative* viability coverage may alter candidates' electoral chances. The viability data captured here do not suggest who is ahead or behind in polls, fund-raising, ads, and others. It is possible that the candidates in each story receive positive attention for their advertising, fund-raising efforts, or place in the polls. I return to this possibility as I consider avenues for future research.

<sup>43</sup> The female variable should not be interpreted apart from the *female Democrat* and *female incumbent* terms as the base term is only significant in relation to key interactions. Here, female should be interpreted as a nonincumbent Republican female candidate.

**Table 4. Viability Coverage**

	Composite	Horse race	Strategy	Ad Watch	Polling	Funding
Candidate						
Female	.406	.278	.095	<b><i>1.293</i></b>	-.508	-.19
	.311	.335	.28	<b><i>.684</i></b>	.528	.948
Incumbent	-.208	.272	-.218	-.779	.316	<b><i>-.745</i></b>
	.215	.282	.179	.927	.364	<b><i>.445</i></b>
Democrat	.13	.19	-.011	.734	.059	<b><i>-1.027</i></b>
	.178	.258	.148	.697	.288	<b><i>.515</i></b>
Female incumbent	-.143	-.406	.083	.306	.307	-.41
	.388	.383	.348	1.225	.597	.816
Female Democrat	-.171	-.879	.202	-1.192	-.079	<b><i>1.777</i></b>
	.376	.528	.349	1.254	.604	<b><i>1.051</i></b>
Constant	<b><i>-.492</i></b>	<b><i>-18.967</i></b>	<b><i>-.381</i></b>	<b><i>-19.687</i></b>	<b><i>-18.926</i></b>	-.808
	<b><i>.212</i></b>	<b><i>1.169</i></b>	<b><i>.21</i></b>	<b><i>1.16</i></b>	<b><i>.31</i></b>	.505
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.112	.072	.083	.19	.084	.119

Notes: Bold numbers indicate a statistically significant result with  $p < .05$ .

Bold italicized numbers indicate  $p < .1$ .

N = 752 stories.

### Issue Coverage

Previous research suggests a lack of issue coverage in presidential politics (Arnold 2004; Graber 1972; Patterson 1980; Robinson and Sheehan 1983; Russonello and Wolf 1979). Additional research indicates that issues can influence vote choice (Abramowitz 1981; Wright and Berkman 1986). Therefore, differences in the amount or substance of issue coverage received by male and female candidates may prove consequential whether in presidential races or races down the ticket (Falk 2008).

When Kim Kahn (1996) conducted research on female underrepresentation in public office, she found gender differences in the messages candidates offered voters through televised campaign advertisements. A recent article by Sapiro and others (2009) finds no gender differences in candidate, party, or interest group sponsored ads in the 2000 and 2002 election cycles. Kathleen Dolan's (2005) research on candidate self-presentation via the web during the 2002 election cycle also suggests little gender difference. Therefore, any differences found in local news coverage of candidate issues or traits in the 2002 election are likely to be a creation of the media rather than the media's faithful response to differences in candidate self-presentation.

Twenty years ago, based on stereotyping research by the National Women's Political Caucus (1987) and Gallup (1984), Kahn (1994) created composites of "male" and "female" issues. "Male" issues—those on which men were perceived by the electorate to be more competent—included foreign policy, defense spending, arms control, foreign trade, farm issues, and the

**Table 5. Issue Coverage**

	Total Issue Coverage	“Female” Issue Coverage	“Male” Issue Coverage
Candidate			
Female	-.369	.546	-.096
	.349	.372	.339
Incumbent	<b>.602</b>	.12	.03
	<b>.258</b>	.193	.27
Democrat	-.131	.1	-.159
	.213	.17	.204
Female incumbent	-.379	-.276	-.425
	.476	.427	.486
Female Democrat	.572	-.256	.273
	.462	.428	.478
Constant	<b>.535</b>	<b>-.636</b>	-.395
	<b>.233</b>	<b>.244</b>	.339
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.113	.1

*Notes:* Bold numbers indicate a statistically significant result with  $p < .05$ .  
N = 752 stories.

economy. “Female” issues, which voters deemed women capable of responding to, included daycare, helping the poor, education, health care, women’s rights, drug abuse, and the environment. More recent work by Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b) again found that voters attribute different character traits and issue strengths to male and female candidates. Even more recent research suggests less “gender-based-issue ownership” (Bystrom, Robertson, and Banwart 2001; Iyengar and McGrady 2007), but because of the entire body of research on stereotyping in the electorate and the lack of research on television news coverage, Newslab data were used to create gendered issue composites similar to those employed by Kahn (1994) and Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b). As mentioned when the dataset was first described, the “male” issue indicator in this article combines coverage of foreign policy, defense, gun control, globalization, jobs, and taxes. The “female” issue composite includes coverage of childcare, education, the environment, health care, social security, women’s health, and women and politics.

Table 5 again shows no gender differences in “gendered” issue coverage (although the coefficient on incumbent suggests that incumbent males receive slightly more total issue coverage than their peers). Female and male candidates receive similar amounts of coverage on female (whether or not abortion was included) and male issues.

These findings suggest that the media has become less biased in the past 20 years. However, it is also possible that past studies would have come to similar

conclusions if they had controlled for candidates' party affiliation.<sup>44</sup> Democrats and women are likely to “own” similar issues, and over time more Democratic women than Republican women received their party's nomination and competed in general elections (Center for American Women and Politics 2013; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a).

This analysis of issue coverage deserves a final comment. Although I find no differences in the proportion of stories devoted to issues overall, or the proportion of stories devoted to “gendered” issues, this does not necessarily mean that men and women receive similar issue-related coverage. The current analysis of “gendered” issues based on Newslab data does not allow testing for differences in the tone of “gendered” issue coverage. If “female” or “male” issues are covered in a way that suggests that women are better able to handle them, women may stand to benefit. But if coverage of “gendered” issues somehow suggests to voters that women are better able to deal with “female” issues, and men are more well-equipped to handle “male” issues, then an equal amount of airtime spent on issue coverage may tell us little about media bias and its influence on the electorate.

### **Personal Coverage**

Horse race and issue coverage are likely to dominate coverage of the campaign, but personal traits or characteristics of candidates may also be discussed and may enter voters' calculations in the voting booth. Here, gender differences in the overall coverage of personal history and characteristics—coverage focusing on aspects of a candidate, such as his or her childhood, family, history, past substance abuse, and personality traits—are analyzed along with the proportion of coverage devoted to personal scandal.<sup>45</sup>

The results for models in which personal characteristics and scandal coverage are examined are displayed in Table 6.

Again, and in contrast to even fairly recent research (Bode and Hennings 2012, although not directly comparable due to the context and medium of analysis), no statistically significant gender differences in personal or scandal-related coverage of male and female House candidates are apparent (Table 6).

<sup>44</sup> Comparison is also complicated by the medium (local television news as opposed to newspapers) and type of candidate (House rather than Senate, gubernatorial, or presidential) analyzed here.

<sup>45</sup> The dataset I am using is not currently coded for mentions of specific “female” or “male” character traits, such as dependence, passivity, emotion, compassion, aggression, ambition, or leadership ability, which previous research suggests that voters differentially attribute to male and female candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b). Newslab does not provide information on candidates' dress or personal appearance.

**Table 6. Personal Coverage**

	Personal Characteristics	Scandal
Candidate		
Female	.397	-.52
	.462	1.442
Incumbent	<b>-.602</b>	<b>-1.159</b>
	<b>.358</b>	<b>.709</b>
Democrat	.063	.352
	.275	.461
Female incumbent	.426	1.961
	.899	1.716
Female Democrat	-.592	*
	.744	*
Constant	<b>-18.264</b>	<b>-19.097</b>
	<b>1.343</b>	<b>.331</b>
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.1352	.15

*Notes:* Bold numbers indicate a statistically significant result with  $p < .05$ .

Bold italicized numbers indicate  $p < .1$ .

N = 752 stories.

\* No scandal coverage of female Democratic candidates.

## Conclusions

A content analysis of local television news coverage of 172 House candidates in the country's top 50 media markets was performed to determine the differences in the amount and substance of reporting on male and female candidates. Because data from an underexplored medium and office type were analyzed, direct comparison to previous work is not possible. However, analysis of House candidate coverage by the source from which most Americans got their news in the year examined (Lear Center Local News Archive 2008) adds nuance to our general understanding of the relationship between medium and the slant of coverage, and gives us a better feel for how bias in reporting may vary across office type (Bystrom 2003). While a small number of gender differences in local television news coverage are apparent, overall coverage of female candidates appears less biased than indicated in earlier research. Female candidates received the same amount of coverage as male candidates. There were no significant gender differences in the issue, or personal coverage of candidates. And although the coefficient indicating ad watch coverage of nonincumbent female candidates nears statistical significance and suggests that candidates of this type received slightly increased coverage of this type, in 2002, 19 out of 39 women won their races compared with 65 out of 133 men, which suggests little to no electoral impact.

Gender differences in reporting may be disappearing, but remaining differences in coverage that can be shown to disadvantage female House candidate may have further consequences: if a candidate's viability, preparedness, or credentials are questioned at an early stage in her career (this could happen much earlier than a race for the U.S. House), the candidate may never rise to candidacy for other, higher level, offices (Fox and Lawless 2005). And if those who might consider running for even low-level offices see women in House races and others up and down the ticket inequitably portrayed by the press, they may decide never to become candidates in the first place (Falk 2008; Fox and Lawless 2005; Schlesinger 1966).

The data used in this analysis make it impossible to conclude whether the absence of gender bias in reporting here is due to the medium of analysis, office type, changes in reporting, or data capabilities. Perhaps few differences in coverage are detected here as much less campaign content is provided to television viewers than consumers of print media. And the fact that House candidates receive absolutely less coverage than their peers running for Senate or president could influence the nature of coverage. Future up-to-date research in multiple media, comparing coverage of candidates for a variety of offices and carefully recording differences in reporting, will further enhance our understanding of these issues. I elaborate on several potential avenues for exploration below.

### **Directions for Future Research**

In the future, scholars of media and communication should continue to probe candidate coverage across various mediums (television news, advertisements, campaign conventions, web videos). Because television is a visual medium, future work in the area should explore the nature of visuals accompanying stories concerning male and female candidates. Does the angle (close-up versus full body, shot from below versus above, presented in a group versus solo) from which a candidate is filmed influence voters' perceptions of his or her ability to lead? Do background images (which could subtly suggest male or female stereotypes, or a candidate's experience or attempts to catch up to his or her opponent) interact with the content of reporting? Might gender differences in the use of video or audio bites or the length of voice-overs influence voters' perceptions of candidates?<sup>46</sup> Further research should also focus on reporters' tone and expressions when delivering issue-related coverage because a more nuanced analysis may pick up on important differences not captured here that television viewers and candidates themselves may be exposed and receptive to.

<sup>46</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting these important avenues for future research.

Experimental work in the 1990s (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Kahn 1996) suggested that the electorate reacted differently to newspaper coverage of male and female candidates because of widely held sex stereotypes. Since the 1990s, we have seen many more female officeholders. Greater exposure to female candidates and female officeholders may be breaking down these long-held stereotypes. Updated experimental work should use simulated local television news coverage of male and female candidates, and focus on changes in or the persistence of public reactions to subtle differences in reporting (varying reporters' tone or facial expressions), as well as reporting in which all but the gender of the candidate mentioned is held constant.

This research and research on candidate ambition might be combined to better explain the persistent lack of women in higher office. Even if the media is not influencing the electoral fortunes of existing candidates, bias in reporting may have indirect effects. Perhaps women still believe that the media environment is hostile toward their candidacies (Falk 2008; Githens 2003). Potential candidates may internalize the sexism seen in coverage of national figures like Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, and self-select out of even lower level races. Yet women may be aware of and encouraged by disappearing differences in media coverage. The future of gender and politics research and increased female representation depends on exploring the ways in which multiple theories of female underrepresentation interact with one another.

### **Appendix: 2002 Local News Campaign Coverage Coding**

#### **Type of Race That Is the Focus of the Story**

What race is this story primarily focused on?

- If the story features more than one office, select 'multiple races' and please specify each race that is mentioned.
  1. President
  2. U.S. Senate
  3. U.S. House of Representatives
  4. Governor

99. Other not race-related, please specify<sup>47</sup>

#### **Type of Election That Is the Focus of the Story**

What kind of election does the story focus on?

<sup>47</sup> Only stories focused on candidates for the U.S. House are included in the analyses reported here.

- A story focuses on a primary election if it features multiple candidates of the same party or parties (i.e., three Democratic candidates for the same House seat, two Republicans, and two Democrats running for governor in the same state).
  - All other stories should be coded as focusing on the general election.
    1. Primary election
    2. General election
98. Unclear

## **Viability Coverage**

### ***Strategy***

- The story focuses on the tactics of a candidate, party, or interest group. A strategy story tells you more about the “game” or “style” of politics and elections and less about substance or issues.

### ***Adwatch***

- The story analyzes a candidate or interest group ad for the claims it makes or its use of imagery. If a story is about the strategy behind a series of ads or how one candidate attacks his or her opponent with ads but does not assess the claims made in the ads it would not be considered an adwatch. It would most likely be coded as strategy.

### ***Horse Race***

- The story is primarily concerned with which candidate is ahead or behind in a race. Poll results are usually a part of these stories.

### ***Focus on Polling***

- Is the story about a poll?

### ***Focus on Fund-Raising***

- Is the story about fund-raising?

## **Issue Coverage**

### ***Issue***

- The story concentrates on an issue such as terrorism, taxes, or education, sometimes discussing candidates’ positions on issues.

*Story Themes*

**Which themes are mentioned in this story?**

- Taxes
- Employment/jobs
- International trade/globalization
- Abortion
- Gun control
- Education/schools
- Health care
- Childcare
- Social security
- Women's health
- Defense/military
- Foreign policy
- Environment
- Women in politics

**Personal Coverage**

*Personal Characteristics*

- The story focuses on aspects of a candidate such as his or her childhood, family history, past substance abuse, personality traits.

*Focus on a Scandal*

- Is the story about a scandal?

**About the Author**

**Lesley Lavery** is an assistant professor of political science at Macalester College. She is also an affiliate of the Center for Education Data and Research at the University of Washington, Bothell. Her research focuses on education policy, public and social policy, and political behavior. She can be reached at [llavery@macalester.edu](mailto:llavery@macalester.edu).

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