



Female Lawmakers, Bills, & Editorial Scrutiny: Analyzing Coverage on White Women & Women of Color



Julia S. Bourkland, Indiana University | jsbourkl@iu.edu
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Introduction

My project focuses on editorial treatment of female legislators. Existing women and politics literature find that news outlets of several mediums treat women and minorities less favorably. This holds true for women and minorities in positions of legislative power, who are discussed frequently and openly in our media outlets. Looking at editorial news data available through LexisNexis, I compare how female legislators are discussed versus male legislators. Several additional variables were coded to test for multiple hypotheses. I used a portion of my stipend to code for US and UK databases through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) research service, through which I vetted and paid coders. The coding for these datasets is in process. Portions of my coding rely on political science content analysis dictionaries which measure sexist and gendered language from *subtle* levels (benevolent sexism) to explicit levels (overt sexism) (Conroy & Daku, forthcoming).



SLATE From left to right: Congresswomen Tlaib, Pressley, Omar, and Ocasio-Cortez



Chicago Tribune

Republican congressmen taking oath during the swearing-in of the 116th United States Congress

Methodology & Hypotheses

I used news data via LexisNexis as my content environment. After setting my parameters (U.S. sources only for the American database, U.K. sources only for the House of Commons database; time periods that would not break a legislative session; editorials and opinion pieces only, no reported stories), I searched for the following key terms: “welfare”, “infrastructure”, “pay gap”, “criminal justice”, “national security”, “immigration enforcement”, “pathways to citizenship”, “immigrant detention”, “reproductive rights”, “housing”, “economy”, “education”, and “police brutality”. I additionally searched for the terms “bill” and “legislation” to ensure my environment concerned the prospect of prospective law and not each topic broadly. After procuring a random sample of 60 articles for each dataset using a random number generator, I outlined my variables in Excel and carried out my pilot via MTurk. The following are my working hypotheses:

H₁ - Sexism: Editorials will write about lawmakers based on their gender, using sexist language for women and logic, policy-focused language for men.

H₂ - Positionality & Topic: Editorials will describe lawmakers based on the position of the lawmaker discussed (sponsor/opponent) and the topic concerned.

H₃ - Chronological Improvement: Editorial content will depend on a changing culture toward women, differences in the year, less use of hostile sexist language over time, and more benevolent sexist language over time.

H₄ - Party Identification: Discussion of a lawmaker will depend on their party membership and ideological views.

Works Cited

- Daku, M. & Conroy, M. (Forthcoming). “Code Like a Girl: The Development of a Stand-Alone Dictionary for the Automated Analysis of Gendered Language in Text”.
- Liu, S.J.S. (Forthcoming). “Gendering Immigration: Media Framings of the Economic and Cultural Consequences of Immigration. Presented at the 2018 Western Political Science Association Conference.

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Possible Obstacles

Due to the nature of women in the U.S. Congress and the U.K. House of Commons, only a small handful are discussed in the public eye. Additionally, because so many editorials focus on political personalities as opposed to dissecting each individual bill, editorials at large may focus on an even smaller number of women, favoring a discussion about Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez over a discussion about Rep. Debbie Dingell.

Implications

Measuring the treatment of elected officials will become increasingly more important in political science as legislative bodies and candidate pools diversify. Writers published in major news outlets act as facilitators for public-political conversation; it is therefore important that we pay attention to the ways our lawmakers are discussed in editorials and opinion pieces. Additionally, measuring the ways sitting female lawmakers are editorialized can provide insight into the ways in which policy topics are written about in gendered terms.



Democratic congresswomen celebrate in suffragette white during the swearing-in of the 116th United States Congress