

Gender, Ambition, and Legislative Behavior in the United States House

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the role of gender and elections in shaping the size of legislators' policy agendas in Congress. Despite the increase in women who hold elective office, perceptions of political leadership are still associated with male traits and stereotypes. As female legislators seek to gain influence in Congress and work to represent their constituents, they develop comprehensive legislative agendas. In their quest for higher office, men in Congress expand the size of their legislative agendas, but their female colleagues, armed with larger preexisting legislative agendas, do not. Thus, gender has a critical role in moderating the election-legislative behavior linkage.

KEYWORDS

Congress; legislative behavior; gender politics

Do women carry out their representational roles in Congress differently than men? Contemporary accounts in the legislative studies literature suggest they do. Women are more active than their male colleagues on both the floor of the House (Pearson and Dancey 2010) and in bill sponsorships (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). In addition, female members of Congress (MCs) have distinct legislative agendas; for instance, in both state and national legislatures women have consistently been more active on “women’s” issues, such as women’s health and education (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002, 2005; Thomas 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991; Wolbrecht 2002).¹

Although female MCs likely represent women’s interests better than their male colleagues, it may be that this is at the expense of ignoring the larger interests and policy priorities of their districts. If the legislative agendas (i.e., the issues for which they sponsor legislation on in Congress) of female legislators are exclusively focused on “women’s” issues, then the policy priorities of their constituents as a whole may be ignored. For example, if women focus their legislative proposals on issues dealing with reproductive rights, then they might not be representing their districts on other issues, such as agriculture or the environment. In doing so, female MCs may not be best representing the full range of policy interests of their constituents.

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Importantly, though, we should expect MCs' legislative behavior to be impacted by other considerations, such as their present electoral considerations. Conventional wisdom holds that MCs use every instrument available to aid in their election efforts (Fenno 1978). Among these tools are policy-making activities that come with elective office. MCs formulate their legislative activity and then highlight their legislative records on the campaign trail. Given that MCs are both campaigning and legislating at the same time, since the legislative session does not stop for the length of the campaign season, MCs must adjust their legislative activity while they are actively campaigning in order to maximize their election efforts. This is particularly important when MCs are running for higher office and are thus appealing to a larger statewide or national constituency.

Herein, we investigate the ways in which men and women formulate their legislative agendas in the House and examine how incumbents adapt these legislative agendas in response to their quests for higher office. Our findings from cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses from the 102nd–110th Congresses/1992–2008 election cycles indicate that female MCs tend to have larger legislative agendas. However, in the wake of their campaigns for higher office, only male MCs adjust their legislative agendas to their election contexts. In doing so, it is only when male MCs are running for higher office that the size and scope of their legislative agendas reflect a similar scale as that of their female colleagues.

This study offers a number of contributions. First, our findings indicate that gender is an important factor in studying legislative behavior and representation. As social role theory suggests, gender serves as a strong basis for how we categorize people and assess their actions and behaviors (Eagly 1987; Eagly and Karau 2002; Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann 2000). In leadership (political or otherwise), a fundamentally masculine trait and a stereotypical male endeavor, women must both engage in leadership and conform to their gender roles. Consequently, it is important to consider gender in our analyses of legislation behavior.

Second, our study provides evidence that progressive ambition (the desire for higher office) and higher-office seeking (the act of seeking higher office) impacts legislative behavior. We should expect that higher-office seekers will expand their policy interests in response to a larger and more diverse state-level or national constituency base by focusing on a larger set of issues in their legislative activity. In doing so, MCs engage in credit claiming and position taking (Mayhew 1974) as they point to their legislative activity as evidence of their responsiveness to existing or potential constituencies on the campaign trail, even if they have only been active on a single piece of legislation in a particular policy domain. Assessing the extent to which MCs enlarge their legislative agendas while they are seeking higher office captures the real-time campaign–legislative behavior dynamic.

We begin first by placing our study in the context of how gender shapes legislative behavior. Next, we discuss how seeking higher office impacts legislative behavior and the role of gender in moderating this effect. We then provide an overview of the data and measures and present the results of the cross-sectional and longitudinal data analyses.

Gender in Congress

Although the representation of women in elective office has grown over time, one of the lingering hurdles for women in political office is that stereotyped beliefs about gender affect not only how the public perceives women in political office but also how women carry out their duties in elective office. Gender stereotypes are a function of the social roles we assign members of each sex, and these stereotypes impact how we perceive the actions and behaviors of group members (Eagly and Karau 2002). Contemporary conceptions of political leadership still rest solely in the realm of stereotyped masculine traits, with dominance and competitiveness winning out over feminine traits, such as collaboration and compassion (see, for example, Burrell 2008; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1996). As Eagly and Karau (2002) contend, “women leaders’ choices are thus constrained by threats from two directions: Conforming to their gender role would produce a failure to meet the requirements of their leader role, and conforming to their leader role would produce a failure to meet the requirements of their gender role” (576). Moreover, women in the political realm are viewed as warmer and more honest while their male counterparts are viewed as strong leaders and better at handling crises.

Congress itself is a gendered institution with a structure and organization designed and maintained by men (Acker 1992; Kenney 1996). Women tend to be more cooperative and prefer diffuse decision-making structures like building consensus, while men tend to favor styles that emphasize competition (Reingold 1996; Rosenthal 1998; Thomas 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991). Male legislators, therefore, may fare better at the political game in Congress than women. Although collaboration may lead women to be more effective legislators (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013), and women in Congress are credited with successfully negotiating the 2013 budget deal to prevent a government shutdown (Newton-Small 2013), men hold most of the leadership positions in Congress and thus control the legislative agenda. Additionally, as polarization in Congress and the country as a whole continues to grow, staunch partisans in both camps punish those who work across party lines.² Thus, the contemporary climate in Congress, and the country at large, runs counter to how women best work as policymakers.

If women hope to be political leaders that ascend the ranks of the US Congress and beyond, how do they go about doing so when the institution is

gendered and the public and their colleagues alike view leadership through the lens of masculine traits? One such way is for women legislators to use their roles as policymakers to develop a broad policy expertise in order to gain credibility and demonstrate leadership. Unlike other forms of legislative activities, such as roll call votes in which the content and timing of the activity are tightly controlled by majority party leaders, MCs engage in proactive legislative actions, such as building their policy agendas through bill sponsorships (Burden 2007; Schiller 1995). Bill sponsorships allow MCs to selectively take positions on particular issues and demonstrate their commitments to these policy areas through the cultivation of their legislative agendas (Sulkin 2005, 2011). In doing so, MCs can introduce legislation on a set of issues in order to demonstrate policy expertise and command of a policy domain, while also adhering to gender norms associated with leadership in contemporary politics.³

Findings in the congressional studies literature provide a clear linkage between gender and select policy activity in Congress. Female MCs are more active sponsoring and cosponsoring legislation on women's issues, such as education, women's health, and children's issues (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002, 2005; Thomas 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991; Wolbrecht 2002). Women also request more earmarks for women's issues (Schulze 2013; Schulze and Hurvitz 2016). In short, women legislators are critical in advocating and promoting policies that directly impact women and children, and as history has shown, without women in elected office these issues would be largely ignored.

Taken as a whole, we expect the pathway of policy representation and leadership in Congress to be different for men and women based on the scope of their legislative agendas. First, women in Congress have barriers to climb, stereotypes to overcome, and glass ceilings to break. We expect women do this, among many ways, by being active on bill sponsorships. As mentioned above, previous research finds that women identify select issues as being more important than their male colleagues. That means women are more attuned to forgotten issues, lapsed concerns, and overdue agenda items. Women MCs, therefore, have a two-pronged philosophy to legislating. On the one hand, they want to be just as active as their male colleagues on salient issues of the day. On the other hand, they also prioritize a select sub-group of issues not generally represented by the majority of male legislators. In turn, women in Congress are both advocates for women and women's interests as well as agents who fulfill the needs of their larger districts, all the while demonstrating leadership without violating gender norms. We hypothesize, therefore, that the legislative style of women in the House leads to legislative agendas that encompass a larger range of policy domains compared to male MCs.⁴

Ambition and higher-office seeking in the House

Although men and women in Congress may go about their representative roles in different ways, they have the same election and career considerations, such as keeping their current office or seeking higher office. Joseph Schlesinger's (1966) foundational study developed a theory of political ambition that focuses on the connection between politicians' elective office career goals and their behavior while in office. From goals of long-term careers in the office they currently hold (static ambition) to careers that are more limited in time (discreet ambition) to goals of elective office that reach beyond the offices presently held (progressive ambition), Schlesinger's ambition framework serves as the cornerstone in the literature that investigates, among many things, the decisions made by, and the behavior of, elected officials and the ways in which political opportunity structures impact career pathways.

The decision to seek higher office⁵ means that elected officials are campaigning for the office they hope to obtain while also juggling the responsibilities of the office they presently hold. As Mayhew (1974) contends, the reelection imperative encourages elected representatives to behave in ways that maximize their election outcomes. For progressively ambitious MCs, this means using their current office to assist them in getting elected to higher office. For example, MCs can use institutional legislative tools, such as bill and resolution sponsorships, to boost themselves in their upcoming campaigns so that they can try to keep their office or obtain a more prestigious position.

Connecting progressive ambition to legislative behavior empirically is challenging, however, because ambition itself is a psychological concept. To overcome this, some studies assert that all MCs are progressively ambitious, and if the political climate is favorable and opportunity to seek higher office presents itself, any elected official would seek higher office (see, for example, Rohde 1979). From roll calls to amendments to bill sponsorships, the behavior of legislators in the House is a reflection of the higher office they hope to someday acquire. When we assume progressive ambition, however, we ignore the reality that many elected to the House have discreet or static ambition and have little or no interest in seeking higher office. As suggested, at a minimal level MCs behavior reflects their ambition to at least stay in the office they presently hold.

An alternative approach is to study progressive ambition from the lens of how the act of seeking higher office itself directly impacts legislative behavior. This allows researchers to move away from studying ambition as a psychological concept and instead focus on how changes in constituencies and campaign experiences shape legislative behavior (Hibbing 1986). This approach also separates itself from the assumption that all MCs are progressively ambitious. Instead, we can study the ways in which MCs might seek to

appeal to prospective constituencies (e.g., statewide) while they are in the office presently held (congressional district).

Empirical investigations into the linkages between higher-office seeking and legislative behavior indicate that higher-office seekers in Congress adjust their roll call voting behavior by shifting their voting patterns to conform to the constituency they would like to obtain (Carey 1994; Francis and Kenny 1996; Francis et al. 1994; Hibbing 1986; Rothenberg and Sanders 2000). Fewer studies have moved beyond roll calls to focus on how MCs' proactive activities (Burden 2007), such as bill sponsorships and cosponsorships, might be influenced by their decisions to enter races for higher office. Of these studies, the findings suggest that MCs introduce more bills while they campaign for higher office (Herrick 2001; Herrick and Moore 1993), but are less successful in pushing their proposals through the legislative process (Herrick and Moore 1993), and may be less active overall in the House during this time (Victor 2011).

Requisite to higher-office aspirations, MCs should have a broader level of policy expertise. From an institutional perspective, MCs are rewarded in the House for developing a policy expertise (Grant 1973), and focusing on a narrow set of policy areas allows MCs to develop a specialization, or concentrated policy focus. When MCs are seeking higher office, they are appealing to a larger and broader constituency.⁶ Thus, higher-office-seeking MCs have an incentive to become more generalists in their bill sponsorships and exhibit more dispersed policy interests and activity. However, the findings on this are largely mixed, with some evidence suggesting that MCs become more specialized while they run for higher office (Herrick and Moore 1993) and other evidence suggesting that MCs become more generalized during this time (Victor 2011).

One of the shortcomings of this approach to studying the ambition–legislative behavior linkage is that the focus on specialization may not capture the underlying dynamics of how elections impact legislative behavior. It may be that a measure of overall legislative agenda size is a better measure than policy specialization—a measure of the concentration of policy attentiveness. For instance, it may be that legislators tackle a larger number of issues and introduce the same number of bills on each issue. Alternatively, it may be that MCs tackle some issues with greater force than with which they address others. Thus, higher-office-seeking MCs who are appealing to a larger constituency may become active on a larger set of issues in Congress, but the degree of concentration of this activity may not change depending on how many total bills they introduce in each policy area. In studying the election–legislative behavior linkage, the degree of specialization of legislative agendas does not capture how MCs use their policy agendas while they are on the campaign trail, as even a single piece of legislation can be used by MCs to showcase their attentiveness to a particular policy domain.

Further, extant approaches largely do not account for the underlying role of gender. In addition to the underrepresentation of women in politics, the factors that lead women to pursue elective office at all levels of government are markedly different from their male counterparts. Women, compared to men, tend to devalue their own skills and experiences and are less likely to see themselves as credible candidates for office (Fox and Lawless 2005; Moore 2006; Windett 2014). Women are also less likely to be recruited for political office (Fox and Lawless 2005, 2010; Sanbonmatsu 2006) and tend to run for office later in life (Thomas, Herrick, and Braunstein 2002; Windett 2014).

Of those already in an elective office position and looking to run for higher office, women are more likely to pursue a Senate seat when there is a larger geographic overlap between their congressional districts and the state at large (Palmer and Simon 2003). Women are also less likely to take electoral risks when running for U.S. Senate (Fulton et al. 2006). When it comes to running for governor, the evidence is less conclusive; some findings indicate that women are more likely than their male colleagues to engage in risk-taking behavior, such as challenging an incumbent governor (Windett 2014). At the same time, women are more cautious and, compared to their male counterparts, tend to only run for higher office when the probability of winning is less electorally risky (Windett 2014).

Taken as a whole, there are different patterns for men and women in their decisions to both run for elective office and seek higher office. Consequently, women and men will likely be responsive to their electoral contexts in different ways. We expect the act of seeking higher office will have different impacts on their legislative behavior in the House. As MCs seek to move beyond the elected position they presently hold, it requires appealing to a larger, and typically more diverse, constituency base. In order to make these appeals, MCs should prioritize a larger number of issues in their legislative agendas.

In its simplest form, we hypothesize that men increase the size of their legislative agendas when they seek higher office but their similarly situated women colleagues do not. The logic for men to increase the breadth of their legislative agendas is to engage in credit claiming (Mayhew 1974) on the campaign trail. The literature shows that even if a bill does not pass, bill sponsorship can and is used in campaign appeals (Campbell 1982; Herrick and Moore 1993; Schiller 1995; Sulkin 2005, 2011). The logic is the same for women on this note: women should want more comprehensive legislative agendas when seeking higher office. However, if women are already active on a high number of policy areas, then they just do not have the same amount of room for growth in the size of their policy agendas. Drafting, formulating, and introducing bills in Congress requires a great deal of work compared to, for example, signing on to be a cosponsor on a piece of legislation or taking a roll call vote. Compared to male MCs seeking higher office,

we hypothesize that the preexisting breadth of women's policy agendas coupled with the demands of the campaign trail should lead women seeking higher office to not have as heightened a level of legislative activity in Congress (for example, bill sponsorships). With their already high levels of activity on bill sponsorships, women seeking higher office simply will not have the time to focus on introducing legislation at heightened levels—that is, there is likely a ceiling effect on the size of legislators' policy agendas as women cannot hope to cover every policy area. Instead, these women MCs will likely focus their energy on their legislative actions that are not as time consuming, in addition to their quests for higher office and the gendered stereotypes they will have to overcome along the way (see, for example, Dolan 2004, 2010, 2014)—the latter of which is something not faced by their male colleagues. This undoubtedly affects how they position themselves in elections, how their opponents campaign against them, and how voters evaluate them on Election Day.

Data and measurement

To explore the relationship between gender, ambition, and legislators' policy agendas, we use data from the 102nd–110th Congresses/1992–2008 election cycles. This data set, originally compiled by Sulkin (2005), was updated to include the 109th and 110th Congresses by LaForge (2012) and one of us. For this project, our sample includes all legislators who served full terms in each Congress during the time frame. MCs in a given Congress who died, resigned, entered into office via special election, or were appointed after the start of the first session of the Congress, and those from at-large districts are omitted, because the latter's constituency does not change when running for statewide office, there are 946 individual MCs and 3,763 total observations over the nine Congresses under investigation. Female MCs make up a much smaller proportion of House members, with a total of 466 observations for (116 unique) female MCs compared to 3,297 observations for (830 unique) male legislators.⁷

The key independent variables are each MC's gender and status as a higher-office seeker. Gender is measured as a dichotomous variable for *woman*. For the second independent variable, we followed Victor's (2011) lead to investigate not only the role of ambition in shaping what legislators say and do in office but also how the act of seeking higher office itself leads MCs to behave fundamentally differently in Congress than those who are not seeking higher office. During the time frame under investigation, there are 103 instances in which MCs sought higher office, the majority of which (78) are campaigns for a seat in the US Senate. *Higher-office-seeking man* is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the MC is male and is running for a statewide office of governor, lieutenant governor, or the US Senate. *Higher-office-seeking woman* indicates a woman that is seeking higher office.

The dependent variable focuses on the size of the legislators' policy agendas through MCs' bill and resolution sponsorship behavior. Bill and resolution introductions reflect the choices MCs make about how to allocate their time and the issues that they prioritize. MCs use bill sponsorships to develop their legislative agendas that demonstrate their policy commitments by tying themselves to particular issues (Schiller 1995). These policy agendas are critical to legislators in their roles as policymakers *and* candidates, and constituents may be more concerned about their representatives' policy agendas than their individual roll call votes (Arnold 1990). Further, MCs point to their policy proposals in their efforts to take positions on issues and claim credit for their work in Congress (Mayhew 1974). These legislative activities are traceable and can easily connect legislators to specific outcomes (Arnold 1990), allowing MCs to claim credit over a particular bill/issue area (Campbell 1982; Mayhew 1974) or signal their policy priorities (Koger 2003; Schiller 1995; Sulkin 2005). This indicates that legislators' policy proposals are important signals of the MCs' policy priorities, and the size of their policy agendas captures the scope of these priorities.

We utilize Sulkin's (2005, 2011) policy agenda data that combine the approaches of Adler and Wilkinson's (1991–2008) Congressional Bills Project and Simon's (2002) content analysis of Senate campaign discourse. Sulkin studies the policies candidates advance in elections and how that maps onto their legislative policy agendas in Congress. The issue typologies in Adler and Wilkinson's Congressional Bills Project has a coding scheme of 19 major topic codes and 225 subtopic codes for all bills and resolutions introduced in the 80th–113th Congresses. Topic codes are comprehensive and mutually exclusive. To capture the dynamics of campaigns, Simon's (2002) content analysis of campaign dialogue has similar categories. Taken together, Sulkin's (2011) policy agendas data make some minor alterations to the Adler and Wilkinson coding scheme by, for example, making some subtopics major topics to reflect the dynamics of the congressional campaigns. In total, these data include 19 policy categories: agriculture, budget, campaign finance, children's issues, civil rights, consumer issues, corporate regulation, crime, defense and foreign policy, education, environment, governmental operations, health, jobs and infrastructure, Medicare, moral issues, Social Security, taxes, and welfare. Each policy item is coded as one category. For some legislation, like that geared toward reducing taxes, the topic code and the legislative act easily correspond. For others, the coding scheme requires coding according to the principal issue of the bill. In the case of policies on veterans' health benefits, for example, these legislative acts are coded as health policy items.

The dependent variable, *legislative agenda size*, is a count of the total number of issues (i.e., agenda breadth) each MC introduced bills and resolutions on in a given Congress. For example, in the 102nd Congress,

Representative Jane Harman (D-CA) introduced five bills covering four policy areas of budget, crime, defense, and taxes, and hence her *legislative agenda size* is four.⁸ Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of legislators' agendas across all legislators, and disaggregated by gender and status as a higher-office seeker. Looking first at the number of legislators who seek higher office, it is clear that, unsurprisingly, fewer women do so than men (11 and 92, respectively). This averages to 11 men running for higher office in a given Congress/election cycle, while only one woman does so. This difference dissipates when we consider the percentages of men and women who seek higher office. On average, 2.3% of female MCs and 2.8% of male MCs campaign for higher office in a given Congress.⁹ What this suggests, then, is that perhaps the well-documented gender ambition gap (see, for example, Fox and Lawless 2005; Fulton et al. 2006) may not necessarily extend to women who presently hold office in the national legislature. As suggested, once women enter into Congress, they pursue higher political office at similar levels as their male colleagues.

Table 1 also indicates that women introduce legislation on a larger number of issues than male MCs. Male legislators, on average, introduce bills and resolutions on 5.7 issue areas in a given Congress, while their female colleagues average 6.3 policy areas ($t = -5.34, p < .01$). Although this difference may at first appear substantively small, if we pooled together all observations of women MCs in the sample, 466 total, this difference amounts to a great deal more activity for women in the House compared to men. These data also show that higher-office seekers have larger policy agendas than non-higher-office seekers, 5.6 areas compared to 6.9 areas, respectively ($t = -4.58, p < .01$). There is no difference in the mean legislative agenda size for women and men who seek higher office, but we expect that differences will emerge in the multivariate analysis.¹⁰

In order to fully assess the effects of gender and higher-office seeking on the size of legislators' policy agendas, we develop a multivariate model that include structural control variables in order to take into account other factors that might impact the size of MCs' legislative agendas. Incorporated into the

Table 1. Gender, Higher-Office Seeking, and Legislative Agendas in the 102nd–110th Congresses/1992–2008 Election Cycles.

	Number of Legislators	Mean Legislative Agenda Size	Standard Deviation
All MCs	3763	5.7	2.8
Women	466	6.3	3.0
Men	3297	5.7	2.8
Higher-Office Seekers	103	6.9	2.8
Women	11	6.6	3.2
Men	92	6.9	2.7
Non-Higher-Office Seekers	3660	5.6	2.8

Note. Cell entries report the total number of MCs in the sample and the corresponding mean and standard deviation of legislative agenda size in the 102nd–110th Congresses.

models are four variables linked to smaller legislative agendas. Dichotomous variables indicating whether the MC is a *freshman* in a given Congress and another dummy variable for if the MC is *retiring* at the end of a given Congress are both in the model (Rothenberg and Sanders 2000). Adding to this, we also controlled for the *seniority* of each MC by squaring the count of the number of years each MC has served in the House. Research also indicates that electoral vulnerability is linked to legislators' policy activity in Congress (Herrick and Moore 1993; Rothenberg and Sanders 2000; Sulkin 2005; Victor 2011). Because of this, we control for the percentage of two-party vote share each MC received in the previous general election cycle. Finally, we control for whether a member was a committee chair during the Congress, because the responsibilities of committee chairs may lead members to have a more narrow set of policy interests. Chairs play an integral role in setting the agenda of the committee and seeing their agendas through the legislative process (DeGregorio 1992; Swers 2005). In the Senate, for example, committee chairs introduce more legislation related to their committees' jurisdictions than they do committees with jurisdictions over issues outside of their committees (Schiller 1995). At the same time, committee jurisdictional lines are often blurred and overlapping given the comprehensive nature of public policy (Smith and Deering 1990), and jurisdictional disputes can often ensue (King 1997). Given that the dependent variable is coded by policy area and not the committee for which it was referred, it may be that chairing a committee does not translate into a smaller legislative agenda. We utilize data from Nelson (2005) for the 102nd Congress and Stewart and Woon (2016) for the 103rd–110th Congresses. *Committee chair* is coded 1 if a member is a chair of a committee for the full length of a particular Congress and 0 otherwise.

Evidence also suggests that MCs who are from large states tend to have larger legislative agendas compared to their colleagues from smaller states (Hibbing 1986; Victor 2011). *State size* measures the size of each legislator's state delegation in the US House.¹¹ We also control for party effects that might be tied to the size of MCs' legislative agendas, because we expect that those in the majority party should have larger legislative agendas than those in the minority party. *Majority party* indicates whether the MC was a member of the majority party in the given Congress, and *Democrat* is an indicator variable for party.

Results

We began our hypotheses tests with a cross-sectional analysis. We pooled together all observations across the nine Congresses/election cycles (102nd–110th/1992–2008). The unit of analysis is the individual legislator in a given Congress. Table 2 presents the results of the negative binomial model

Table 2. Predicting the Size of Legislators' Agendas.

	Coefficient (<i>standard error</i>)	Marginal Effects
Higher-Office-Seeking Man	0.22** (0.04)	1.36
Higher-Office-Seeking Woman	0.02 (.13)	—
Woman	0.16** (0.05)	0.93
State Size	0.00 (0.00)	—
Previous Vote Share	-0.00 (0.00)	—
Committee Chair	0.12* (0.05)	0.69
Seniority	0.00 (0.00)	—
Freshman	-0.27** (0.02)	-1.38
Retiring	-0.12** (0.04)	-0.64
Majority Party	0.08** (0.02)	0.47
Democrat	-0.02 (0.03)	—
Constant	1.86** (0.06)	
<i>N</i>	3763	
Wald χ^2	416.56	
Prob > χ^2	0	

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Note. The unit of analysis is the individual MC. The results are from a negative binomial regression model predicting the size of legislators' policy agendas (i.e., the number of issues each legislators sponsored legislation on in a Congress). Fixed effects for Congress are included in the model and standard errors are clustered by member.

predicting the size of incumbents' legislative agendas, a count of the total number of issues of which each legislator introduced bills and resolutions within each Congress.¹² The post-estimation marginal effects calculations are in the second column. Our expectation is that male MCs who are seeking higher office will have larger policy agendas. So, too, will women in the House. Thus, the coefficients for *higher-office-seeking man* and *woman* should be positive and significant.

The results conform to the narrative that ambitious legislators will be attentive to a larger set of issues as they seek to identify with and appeal to the constituency they hope to have following the next election cycle, but this is only for male MCs. As expected, men seeking higher office have larger policy agendas. The size of this effect is 1.36 policy areas, or a 24% increase in the size of their legislative agendas over that of the average MC. Also as expected, women have larger policy agendas than their male colleagues. The marginal effect of this is 0.93 issues, or a 16% increase over that of the average MC. However, women do not expand the scope of their policy

agendas while they are seeking higher office. Instead, it is likely that these MCs focus their activity—campaigning *and* legislating—on making appeals to the statewide constituency in other ways as they seek to overcome gender stereotypes of political leadership and convince voters to support them. And, as such, armed with their extensive legislative records from previous Congresses, higher-office-seeking women are focused on other methods of campaign appeals during their campaigns.¹³

The structural control variables largely conform to our expectations. The size of legislators' policy agendas is tied to congressional careerism; retiring and new MCs in particular have smaller legislative agendas. The model also indicates that MCs in the majority party attend to 0.47 more issues in their legislative agendas than do members of the minority party. Finally, the results suggest that committee chairs have larger legislative agendas. This is undoubtedly a result of the coding scheme of the content of legislative proposals not mapping directly on to the jurisdiction of committees. King (1997), for example, notes that social welfare policies in particular do not generally fit cleanly into the jurisdiction of committees. Thus, we suspect that this finding, although counterintuitive, is a result of coding the dependent variable by policy area, rather than committee referral, and that coding by the latter would render the result that House committee chairs are more active sponsoring legislation on the bills for which are referred to their committees. All told, the results show that committee chairs are indeed leaders on policy in Congress.

The results point to the notion that the impacts of seeking higher office on legislators' behavior in Congress are exclusively driven by the patterns of behavior for male MCs. The findings suggest that the only time that women do not outpace their male colleagues in the scope of their legislative agendas' policy-making domain is when men are seeking higher office; that is, men in the House are only able to match their women colleagues' attentiveness to a large set of policy areas when they are actively running for a *higher office*.

Modeling changes in behavior over time

One of the limitations of the cross-sectional analysis above is that it is not clear whether it is the act of seeking higher office that drives the results or if the findings are a manifestation of the behavioral patterns of male and female MCs who do and do not seek higher office. Given that seeking higher office is not simply a result of legislators' ambitions for higher office but also a function of the political opportunity structures in MCs' states or at the national level, it could be that the findings are not capturing the impact of higher-office seeking. Instead, it may be that male legislators who desire higher office have systematic patterns of

behavior that do not change when they have the opportunity to seek higher office. Accordingly, the results may not necessarily point to any real impact on legislators' policy agendas due to them seeking higher office but reflect instead the patterns of behavior for MCs who end up running for higher office.

To investigate this further, we undertook a separate analysis that examines between-Congress changes in legislative activity. The expectation is that when legislators are seeking higher office, they should increase the size of their policy agendas between Congresses to demonstrate a breadth in policy expertise that comports with the interests of the constituency they hope to have. Thus, seeking higher office in and of itself should drive MCs to become active on a larger number of policy areas. We hypothesize, however, that such a shift in response to higher-office seeking will be limited to only male MCs seeking higher office, not similarly situated female MCs. Because women legislators have larger agendas at the outset, we expect that they are not responding to their campaign contexts by expanding the size of their legislative agendas. Instead, female legislators seeking higher office have preexisting legislative records that encompass a breadth of issues and are thus focused on making appeals to the statewide constituency in other ways as they seek to overcome gender stereotypes of political leadership and convince voters to support them.

Conversely, we do expect that women MCs, on the whole, will increase the size of their agendas as they progress through their careers. This, again, is a result of women seeking to demonstrate political leadership in Congress as they work to overcome the stereotypes associated with gender. As the findings from the cross-sectional analysis suggest, women are more active on a larger set of issues in Congress, and we expect that women will take on more policy areas over the course of their careers in their efforts to become experts on a range of political issues.

Our analysis examines between-Congress changes in legislative activity. The dependent variable, Δ *agenda size*, measures the change in the size of each MC's legislative agenda between Congresses. For each legislator, we subtract his *legislative agenda size* in the previous Congress from his *legislative agenda size* in the present Congress (e.g., 104th *legislative agenda size* - 103rd *legislative agenda size*). For example, Representative Richard Burr (R-NC) has a *legislative agenda size* of 5 in the 107th Congress and a *legislative agenda size* of 7 in the 108th Congress. Thus, his Δ *agenda size* is 2. MCs who did not serve two full terms in consecutive Congresses are omitted from the analysis.

Figure 1 shows the mean between-Congress Δ *agenda size* for all MCs—women, men, higher-office seekers, women higher-office seekers, men higher-office seekers, and non-higher-office seekers—in the 103rd–110th Congresses. All MCs, on average, increase the size of their policy agendas by .33 issues between Congresses, but female MCs and higher-office-seeking MCs expand their legislative agendas at

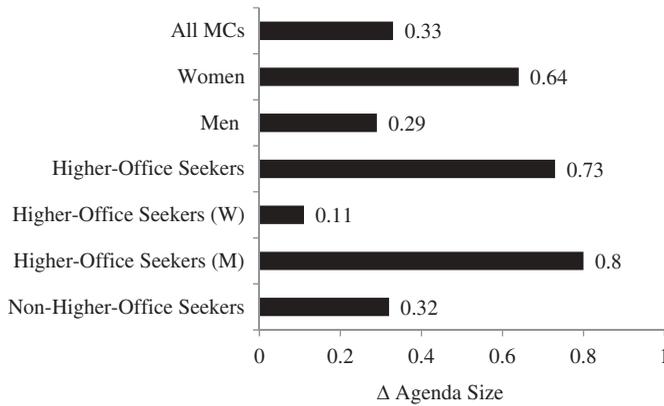


Figure 1. Between-Congress Δ in Size of Legislative Agendas in the 103rd–110th Congresses/1994–2008 Election Cycles. *Note.* Data represent the mean between-Congress change in legislative agendas size (i.e., 102nd & 103rd Congresses; 103rd & 104th Congresses; etc.) for all MCs, women MCs, men MCs, all higher-office seekers, women higher-office seekers, men higher-office seekers, and non-higher-office seekers aggregated across Congresses.

greater levels in each Congress. Across Congresses, female legislators increase their agenda size by an average of over half an issue (.64), while their male colleagues increase their agenda size by half that, at .29 issues ($t = -2.88, p < .01$). In addition, higher-office seekers, on average, increase their policy agendas by .73 issues during the Congress in which they are running for higher office, compared to a mean between-Congress Δ agenda size of .32 for those not seeking higher office ($t = -1.80, p < .075$). The difference in means test does not indicate that men who seek higher office expand the size of their legislative agendas to a larger degree than their similarly situated women colleagues, but we expect that after controlling for other factors, there will be a substantive effect of seeking higher office on men MCs' agendas.

We model the between-Congress change in incumbents' legislative agenda size by using the same key independent variables, *higher-office-seeking man*, *higher-office-seeking woman*, and *woman*, and also many of the same structural control variables from the previous analysis.¹⁴ However, *freshman* is replaced with Δ *freshman status* to indicate whether the MC was a freshman in the previous Congress, because we should expect sophomore legislators to have an uptick in the size of their agendas in their second congressional term. We also control for whether the MC is a member of the minority party in the previous Congress but in the majority party in the present Congress since there was a change in party control of the House in the 104th and 110th Congresses. Finally, we include variables that indicate if the MC is a committee chair in the present Congress but was not in the previous Congress (*new chair*), and whether a member was a chair in the previous Congress but is not in the present Congress (*former chair*).

Table 3 presents the longitudinal analysis with an ordinary least square model predicting the between-Congress change in the size of MCs' legislative agendas in the House. The results indicate that higher-office-seeking male MCs increase the size of their legislative agendas by 0.53 issues when they are campaigning for higher office. Coupling this with the results of the cross-sectional analysis, we see a clear impact of campaigning for higher office on legislative behavior: higher-office-seeking male MCs shift their legislative agendas to incorporate a larger set of issues. This substantive effect suggests a dynamic relationship between seeking higher office and the size of legislators' policy agendas for men in Congress.

Women in the House, on average, increase their policy agendas by 0.23 issues between Congresses; this effect appears to not influence higher-office-seeking

Table 3. Why Do MCs Change the Size of Their Legislative Agendas?

	Coefficient (standard error)
Higher-Office-Seeking Man	0.53* (0.23)
Higher-Office-Seeking Woman	-0.88 (0.69)
Woman	0.23** (0.09)
State Size	0.00 (0.00)
Previous Vote Share	-0.00 (0.00)
New Chair	0.87** (0.23)
Former Chair	-0.72* (0.33)
Seniority	-0.00** (0.01)
Δ Freshman Status	0.91** (0.13)
Retiring	-0.64** (0.15)
Δ Majority Party Status	0.15 (0.17)
Democrat	0.08 (0.05)
Constant	0.52** (0.19)
N	3237
R^2	0.07

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Note. The unit of analysis is the individual MC in each Congress. The results are from an ordinary least square model predicting the between-Congress change in each MC's legislative agenda size (i.e., 102nd & 103rd Congresses; 103rd & 104th Congresses; etc.). A positive coefficient indicates an increase in the size of legislators' policy agendas from one Congress to the next Congress. Fixed effects for Congress are included in the model and standard errors are clustered by member.

female MCs. What this suggests is that, like the findings in the cross-sectional analysis, the legislative activity of women is not impacted when they seek higher office. The election–legislative behavior linkage is not as pervasive for female legislators as it is for their male colleagues, at least not in terms of the size of their legislative agendas.

The structural control variables also largely match the findings in the previous analysis. MCs tend to decrease the size of their policy agendas as they become more senior and ultimately retire from the House. When MCs enter into their sophomore year in the House, they engage in an uptick in activity. Returning House members increase the size of their legislative agendas by 0.91 issues in their second terms. Finally, members that shift from chairing a committee to not chairing a committee decrease the breadth of their policy agendas, and new committee chairs increase the scope of their agendas. Again, the role of committee chair appears to be one of policy leadership in Congress.

Conclusion

The results from both the cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses provides consistent evidence that gender and election contexts shape legislative behavior. Our research moves beyond whether female MCs are better at representing women's interests and explores whether female legislators are better at representing a broader range of issues. Our findings indicate that as women seek to demonstrate policy leadership in the House chamber, they tend to set the ceiling for how many issues areas MCs can feasibly juggle in their legislative agendas. It is no surprise, then, that women are more active overall in introducing legislation and more effective in getting their proposals through the legislative process (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013).

Further, the election–legislative behavior linkage is more nuanced than typically considered; women and men respond differently to their campaign experiences. In their efforts to appeal to a statewide constituency, higher-office-seeking male MCs expand the size and scope of their legislative policy agendas. Because female MCs have larger preexisting legislative agendas in order to build credibility as political leaders through the development of a wide range of policy expertise (a leadership style that does not inherently violate gender norms), they respond to their campaign experiences in different ways than their male colleagues. Women in the House do not enlarge the scope of their legislative agendas while they campaign for higher office because they have already established legislative records and thus likely center their campaign efforts on courting voters and demonstrating policy responsiveness in other ways.

Notes

1. Of course, some scholars define women's issues and women's policy agenda items to include both a broader set of issues (Reingold 2000) and narrower scope of issues

(Bratton 2005). See Reingold and Swers (2011) for further discussion on the identification of women's issues.

2. Speaker of the House John Boehner cited this as one of the reasons for his resignation from the House in September 2015 (Steinhauer 2015).
3. Of course, it may be that even with taking on a policy leadership approach, women are still not viewed as being as knowledgeable as their male counterparts on these issues by both their colleagues in Congress and their constituents back at home. Even so, we should expect that female MCs will take on this type of leadership style as they diversify their legislative agendas to encompass a larger number of policy areas.
4. The focus of the article is not on descriptive or substantive representation but rather on how men and women differently represent their districts in Congress as shown through the size of their legislative agendas. We anticipate that in their roles as representatives, women in Congress have to work harder in Congress in order to demonstrate expertise and leadership. In doing so, we expect to see that women will be active on a larger number of issues to not only represent "women's" and their districts' interests but to demonstrate leadership in a way that does not violate gender norms. This may or not mean that women MCs focus on more women's issues but rather that the scope of their legislative agendas is more comprehensive than that of their male colleagues.
5. A number of studies investigate the decision-making calculus—costs, benefits, and risks—made by the progressively ambitious (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1987; Black 1972; Brace 1984; Fulton et al. 2006; Maestas et al. 2006; Palmer and Simon 2003; Rohde 1979; Schlesinger 1966). Evidence from the congressional studies literature in particular suggests that House members' decisions to enter into gubernatorial and Senate races rest on, for example, the perceived electoral risk, whether the MC is a risk taker, and the size of the state (see, for example, Rohde 1979).
6. Unless perhaps the constituency is the same, such as those representatives in at-large House districts who are running for Governor or the US Senate.
7. As has been well documented, women's representation in the House continues to grow over time, with more recent Congresses featuring consistently higher levels of women in the chamber.
8. We ran the models using an alternative dependent variable that captures the degree of policy specialization in MCs' legislative agendas (*legislative agenda size* / # number of bills introduced). The results suggest no difference in policy specialization in Congress for men and women and higher-office seekers. We contend this result maps on to the nature of the legislating in the House and also the legislative behavior–election linkage. For example, one substantial piece of legislation in a single policy domain could mean a great deal more than a handful of proposals in this area. Adding to this, women and men in Congress, regardless of their election contexts, can use even a single piece of legislation to demonstrate policy responsiveness to both their present and prospective constituencies. Thus, policy specialization as a dependent variable does indeed tell us the level of concentration of policy agendas, but not the full picture of the scope of how MCs cultivate their legislative agenda to engage in policy responsiveness.
9. Although there are only 11 women who ran for higher office during the time period under investigation, exploring gender as an intervening factor in explaining how MCs respond to their higher-office campaign experiences still offers a considerable contribution to the literature. In fact, it may be that because such a small number of women seek higher office, this has meaningful implications about the role of gender in legislative politics because it speaks to the challenges and inequities in US politics.

10. However, with slightly larger standard deviations, there is greater variation in the size of women's policy agendas compared to men—both overall and for higher-office seekers.
11. The mean delegation size for the sample is 19.13. The mean delegation size for higher-office seekers is 13.24.
12. The formula for the negative binomial model is $\text{Log}(\text{Legislative Agenda Size}) = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{Higher-Office Seeking Man}) + \beta_2(\text{Higher-Office Seeking Woman}) + \beta_3(\text{Woman}) + \beta_4X + \beta_5Y + \beta_6Z + E$, where X is a vector of variables capturing state and district-level conditions (State Size and Previous Vote Share), Y is a vector of variables capturing congressional conditions (Committee Chair, Seniority, Freshman, Retiring, Majority Party, and Democrat), and Z is a vector of variables capturing fixed effects for Congress. Standard errors are clustered by individual members of Congress.
13. Although this finding maps onto our hypothesis, the null finding could be a result of the low number of women in Congress seeking higher office (11) in the statistical model. As women continue to enter the ranks of Congress, further study of the impacts of how gender, campaign contexts, and the intersection of the two shape legislative behavior is warranted.
14. The formula for the OLS model is $\Delta \text{Agenda Size} = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{Higher-Office-Seeking Man}) + \beta_2(\text{Higher-Office-Seeking Woman}) + \beta_3(\text{Woman}) + \beta_4X + \beta_5Y + \beta_6Z + E$, where X is a vector of variables capturing state political conditions (State Size and Previous Vote Share), Y is a vector of variables capturing congressional conditions (New Chair, Former Chair, Seniority, Δ Freshman Status, Retiring, Δ Majority Party Status, and Democrat), and Z is a vector of variables capturing fixed effects for Congress. Standard errors are clustered by individual members of Congress.

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