RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES AMONG CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS AND THE SUCCESS OF WOMEN CANDIDATES†

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My analyses test these hypotheses by looking at three dependent variables: (1) whether at least one woman entered a district’s Democratic/Republican primary, (2) whether a woman was nominated in the Democratic/Republican primary, and (3) whether a woman was elected to Congress. The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) provided all of the data necessary to create these indicators. CAWP datasheets list the names and partisanship of all female primary candidates in each district for each of the elections held between 2006 and 2012, and I verified their candidate list for each cycle against the results that states submitted to the Federal Elections Commission (FEC), which facilitated the elimination of candidates who ran only in special election contests or who filed but then withdrew before their primary. CAWP materials also provided the data to identify female primary and general election winners. As the study’s dependent variables are all dichotomous, they are all dummy coded 0-1.

Measuring a District’s Religiosity and the Presence of Different Denominations

Testing my main argument requires a measurement of each district’s overall religiosity, which I operationalized as the percentage of a district’s residents who are affiliated with any religious congregation. To explore the strength of different denominations in the districts, I created similarly coded indicators for the percentage of each district’s residents who are mainline

1 All data were obtained from CAWP’s on-line archives for past elections: http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/elections/past_election_info.php. The center’s primary lists included information on female general election candidates for Texas (2006 only) and Louisiana (all cycles) because these states did not hold primaries, and instead used runoff elections when no candidate won more than 50 percent of the vote. Similarly, the CAWP data listed female primary candidates in Utah, Connecticut, and Virginia, but in some instances, party convention delegates selected nominees without a general primary. In cases where it was not possible to determine how many candidates were involved in a convention-decided nomination, the party’s nominee is analyzed here just like the other candidates who had uncontested primaries. Finally, the state of Washington has open primaries to select two nominees, and both general election contestants can be from the same party. Candidates there run with party labels, however, so the state’s female candidates were analyzed just as they were in the conventional partisan primaries.
Protestants, evangelical Protestants, or Roman Catholics. Nearly 90% of Americans who are religiously affiliated belong to one of these three religious groups.

The source for the district-level religion indicators is the 2000 and 2010 editions of the Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS). The Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) administers this decennial census of religious congregations, and its results are used widely in research by demographers because it is the most reliable source of community-level religious membership estimates for the entire U.S. (Grammich et al. 2012; Lim 2013). ASARB analysts have coded the data so that county-level population estimates for 256 distinct religions are collapsed into the major U.S. religious traditions, as specified in Brian Steensland et al.’s widely used categorization scheme (2000). In 2010, the RCMS reported that 48.8% of Americans were affiliated with a religious congregation of any type. Roman Catholics made up 19.1% of the nation’s population, while evangelical and mainline Protestants comprised 16.2% and 7.3%, respectively. Data quality analyses of the RCMS report that these adherence figures are in line with the denominational breakdowns found in large-N surveys of the percentage of Americans in these denominations who regularly attend services (Lim 2013).

Using county-to-district relationship files from U.S. Census Bureau, I mapped the RCMS’s county-level data into the appropriate congressional districts for each of the 2006-2012 electoral cycles. When year-specific information is not available between decennial censuses,
demographers typically create inter-censual population estimates by combining and adjusting
data collected from before and after the specific years for which estimates are needed (U.S.
Bureau 2012; Adler 2002). As it was not clear at what rate each district’s different religious
group populations were shifting between the 2000 and 2010 editions of the RCMS, it was
prudent to assume the 2000 census might yield better population estimates for some years and
religious groups, while the 2010 results would probably be better for others, especially for the
elections closest to when the RCMS was re-administered in 2010. Reflecting these assumptions,
the indicators for each electoral cycle proportionally combine RCMS data to reflect how far into
the decade each election took place. Thus, for the 2006 cycle, each district’s religious indicators
weigh data from the two RCMS surveys by .4 (2000) and .6 (2010). For 2008, the estimates
weight the RCMS data by .2 (2000) and .8 (2010). Both the 2010 and 2012 measures rely on the
2010 RCMS exclusively.

Isolating the Effects of Religiosity

Previous research shows that assessing the effects of a district’s religiosity on women
candidates also requires controls for a variety of socioeconomic factors. An additive index
containing 12 such variables has been analyzed extensively in the research by Barbara Palmer
and Dennis Simon (2012, 2006). Their work is praised for its comprehensive identification of the
demographic characteristics that make some congressional districts unusually receptive or hostile
to women candidates. These authors’ methodology is directly replicated in Ondercin and

one district. In cases where a county’s boundaries overlapped multiple congressional districts, I split the RCMS
estimates for the number of adherents into multiple districts on the basis of U.S. Census measures of the proportion
of the county that lives in each congressional district. Thus, if 43% of the residents in a county lived in one district
and the remainder resided in another, 43% of each adherent group’s population was figured into the estimates for the
first congressional district, and 57% assigned to the second district. This methodology duplicates Scott Adler’s
(2002) treatment of data available only at the county level in his Congressional District Data Set, which is used in