

Women on the Ballot? Investigating how the American Public Perceives the Emotional Viability of Women to Serve in Politics since 1974*

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At current rates, the World Economic Forum estimates that it will take at least 100 years to reach gender parity in politics. Despite progress in recent years, why is it slated to take so long? Utilizing data from The General Social Survey (GSS), this paper analyzes responses from the American public between 1974 and 2022 to begin to understand how demographic factors, political views, and party identification impact perceptions of the emotional viability of women to serve in politics. This data reveals that despite gendered media framing, Americans largely perceive female politicians as having the emotional capabilities to hold elected office.

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*Code and data are available at: https://github.com/InessaDeAngelis/Perceptions_of_Women_in_Politics

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1 Introduction

Despite changing norms and perceptions, women are largely still missing from elected office in the United States (U.S.), Canada, and across the world. In 2023, the U.S. elected a historic number of women to the House of Representatives with 125 (or 28.7%) and 25 to the Senate (or 25%) (American Women and Politics 2023). The current Vice President, Kamala Harris, is the first woman to hold this office. Although the number of women elected to the highest levels of government in the U.S. is inching toward gender-parity, progress is slow and hard fought. Women’s credibility and perceived power as politicians is impacted by gendered framing by traditional media, priming members of the public to hold biased views about their qualifications (Geus et al. 2021). Framing refers to how information is chosen, interpreted, and presented

by the media, influencing the audience’s perception of it as important and shaping their own decision making procedures (Bashevkin 2009). Previous research has shown that the American public is open to voting for a female president and that gender stereotypes are playing less of a role in the construction of public image and voting behaviours (Holman 2023). However, gender stereotypes continue to be a factor in public perceptions of women in politics.

To gain a further understanding of the impact of gender stereotypes and the perceived emotional viability of women to serve in politics, I track responses by political views and party identification, using data obtained from the U.S. General Statistical Survey (GSS) from NORC (NORC 2022b) at the University of Chicago. These perceptions of women in politics are then analyzed to understand their correlations with demographic factors such as gender and age, as well as tracking the perceptions over time.

My analysis emphasizes that perceptions of women in politics have generally improved over time since the early 1970s, with a small dip in the late 1990s, 2006, and 2016. People who self-identify as Democrats or as having liberal political views in most cases disagree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, while people who self-identify as Republicans or as having conservative political views in some cases agree with the premise. The number of people with conservative views who agree that men are emotionally better suited for politics is not as high as anticipated, but reinforces the political divide on questions about the role of women in politics. In my Discussion section, I explore these key findings and others of note.

In the remainder of this paper, I commence with the [Data](#) section which outlines the nature of the data obtained, limitations, and cleaning procedures. In the [Results](#) section, I present trends found during the analysis process. Then, in the [Discussion](#) section, I provide further insights and future areas of study. In the [Conclusion](#), I summarize the main findings. Lastly, the [Appendix](#) contains a supplemental survey which proposes additional questions to study perceptions of women in politics.

2 Data

The data used in this paper was retrieved from the US General Social Survey (GSS) from NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC 2022b). I obtained both demographic data and data relating to the perceived emotional viability of women in politics, political party affiliation and identification, from 1974 to 2022.

2.1 Source Data

For demographic data, I obtained the following data, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic data obtained from GSS

Variable	New Name	Description	Example
age	age	Respondent’s age	32
sex	gender	Respondent’s sex	female

As noted in Table 2, I obtained this data relating to the emotional viability of women in serve in politics. The survey question for all three variables asks *“Tell me if you agree or disagree with this statement: Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women”* (NORC 2022a). Going forward, I will refer to this as the “women in politics question”. A further discussion of these variables can be found later on in this section.

Table 2: Perceptions of Women in Politics data obtained from GSS

Variable	New Name	Description	Example
fepol	women_in_politics	Men are better suited for politics than women	agree
fepolv	women_in_politics	Men are better suited for politics than women	disagree
fepolnv	women_in_politics	Men are better suited for politics than women	disagree

Lastly, as outlined in Table 3, I retrieved data relating to political views and party identification. The political views survey question asks *“We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I’m going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal–point 1–to extremely conservative–point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?”* (NORC 2022a). The party identification survey question asks *“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?”* (NORC 2022a).

Table 3: Political Party and Identification data obtained from GSS

Variable	New Name	Description	Example
polviews	political_views	Views ranked on a 7-point scale	Slightly conservative
partyid	party_identification	Republican, Democrat, Independent	Strong Democrat

2.2 Data Limitations

Since 1972, GSS has been conducting in-person interviews to track public opinion. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2021 and 2022 surveys were conducted solely online and through mixed-methods. This change in methodology resulted in several limitations, which are discussed in further detail below.

2.2.1 Survey Methodology

The 2022 GSS bridges the methodology from both the traditional face-to-face data collection processes utilized between 1972 and 2018 and the web-based collection method introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, using a mixed mode that includes face-to-face, web, and telephone surveys. Throughout 2022, the GSS conducted an experiment where the sample was divided into two parts. The first part encompassed people doing the face-to-face survey, while the second part included people doing the web and telephone survey. The content of the two parts of the data was not intended to be compared, instead comparing the two modes of collecting data. The sample divided in two for the purpose of comparing methodologies is visible in the `fepolv` and `fepolnv` variables selected for this paper. In 2021 and 2022, the GSS survey updated the variable name from `fepol` to `fepolv` and `fepolnv`, although the phrasing of the question remained the same. Despite these changes in methodology, GSS (NORC 2022a) intends for the 2022 survey to be comparable to the 2018 GSS.

Previous iterations of GSS selected respondents by quota (1972-1976), Kish grid with age ordering (1975-2018), and last birthday (2021). The 2022 GSS shifts to a Kish grid without age ordering, where adults in the household are selected by their order in the household, not age (NORC 2022a). These changes to the selection of respondents, especially considering technological literacy among older populations may impact the survey results from 2021 and 2022.

2.2.2 Gap in 2020 Data

Data from the year 2020 is not recorded and instead spans 2020 and 2021, which is inconsistent with the typically yearly GSS. There was also a shift in methodology, as previously discussed, to address risks from the Covid-19 pandemic which changed which people were selected and how they completed the GSS questionnaire.

2.2.3 “No Answer” & “Don’t Know” Responses

When moving from an in-person interviewing process to web and mixed-method interviews, GSS shifted their approach to how to code uncertainty, indecision, or a refusal to answer from respondents. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, if a respondent opted not to answer a question, interviewers coded it as “No Answer” or “Don’t Know”. However, with the web-based survey in 2021, there was no interviewer to determine how to code a respondent’s non-response. Instead of “No Answer” or “Don’t Know”, users could skip the question. “Skipped on web” indicates that users read the questions but skipped it. “Skipped on web” responses are separated from “No Answer” which continues to be employed for the face-to-face and phone surveys (NORC 2022a).

2.2.4 Impact on this study

Although the majority of the data utilized for this study was obtained prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2021 and 2022 responses may be impacted by the changes in methodology and political context during and following the 2020 election. 2020 was a presidential election year in the United States, which saw Joe Biden and Kamala Harris (Democrat) beat Donald Trump and Mike Pence (Republican). Paired with a changing world and policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, whether it be mass-vaccination campaigns, stimulus cheques, or relief plans, respondents' political views and party identification answers may be impacted. As well, Kamala Harris as a woman of colour on the Democrat ticket may have influenced responses to the women in politics survey question. Despite the significant methodological changes and political climate underpinning the 2021 and 2022 GSS, this will have less of an impact on long-term visualizations and trends.

2.3 Data Cleaning

Data was collected, cleaned, and analyzed using the statistical programming software R (R Core Team 2023), using functions from `tidyverse` (Wickham et al. 2019), `ggplot2` (Wickham 2016), `dplyr` (Wickham et al. 2023), `janitor` (Firke 2023), `KableExtra` (Zhu 2021), `knitr` (Xie 2014), `labelled` (Larmarange et al. 2023), `haven` (Wickham, Miller, and Smith 2022), `Formattable` (Ren and Russell 2021), and `here` (Müller and Bryan 2020).

After downloading and selecting the variables of interest from GSS (NORC 2022b), I performed data cleaning based on the variable definitions outlined in the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a). I removed the years in which the questions asking whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, political views, and party identification were not asked (the raw data set would display answers for those years as NA). I updated the respondent demographic information data set to reflect the years omitted, given that these demographic questions are asked every year.

The political views and party identification questions were asked slightly more frequently between 1974 and 1994, including in some years that the women in politics question was not. The responses from 1976, 1980, 1984, and 1987 were removed to ensure consistency between the two data sets. Similar to the women in politics question, the party affiliation and political views were asked bi-annually starting in 1994, except in 2020 due to Covid-19.

2.3.1 Respondent Demographic Information

During face-to-face interviews, interviewers traditionally coded the `sex` variable based on their observations. However, it was not possible to make this determination with telephone and web administered surveys, so respondents were asked their sex recorded at birth and their current gender identity. GSS then re-coded these responses into one variable: `sex`.

During the data cleaning process, I renamed the `sex` column to `gender`, with the value 1 updated to “Male”, and the value 2 updated to “Female” based on the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a). There were no changes in how respondents were asked to provide their age.

2.3.2 Perceptions of Women in Politics

Between 1974 and 2018, the variable for the women in politics question was `fepol`. However, with the implementation of the online only survey in 2021 and the mixed-methodology survey in 2022, `fepolv` and `fepolnv` were introduced to replace `fepol`. Consequently, employing the `rbind()` function which combines groups of rows together, I merged together the `fepol`, `fepolv`, and `fepolnv` responses into one new variable labelled `women_in_politics`. During the data cleaning process, I update value 1 to “Agree”, and value 2 to “Disagree” based on the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a)

There appears to be no pattern or clear methodology behind why the women in politics question was asked some years over others, as sometimes the question was asked two or three years in a row, then not asked in a subsequent year, before repeating the sequence. Starting in 1994, the women in politics question was asked bi-annually, except in 2020 due to Covid-19 impacting the surveying process.

2.3.3 Political Preferences

During the data cleaning process, I renamed the `polviews` column to `political_views`, with the value 1 updated to “Extremely liberal”, 2 updated to “Liberal”, 3 updated to “Slightly liberal,” 4 updated to “Moderate”, 5 updated to “Slightly conservative”, 6 updated to “Conservative”, and 7 to “Extremely conservative” based on the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a).

Furthermore, during the data cleaning process I renamed the `partyid` column to `party_identification`. I then changed value 0 to “Strong Democrat”, 1 to “Not Strong Democrat”, 2 to “Independent, Close to Democrat”, 3 to “Independent”, 4 to “Independent, Close to Republican”, 5 to “Not Strong Republican”, 6 to “Strong Republican”, and 7 to “Other”, based on the GSS codebook (NORC 2022a).

3 Results

3.1 Respondent Demographics

Between 1974 and 2022, there were 37,005 responses recorded for GSS surveys which specifically asked the women in politics, political views, and party identification questions. Of these respondents, 20,609 (55.7%) identified as female, with 16,346 (44.2%) identifying as male, and 50 (0.1%) opting not to share their `gender` (see Table 4).

Table 4: Number of respondents by gender 1974-2022

Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Female	20609	55.7%
Male	16346	44.2%
NA	50	0.1%

Table 5: Age of Respondents

Youngest	Oldest	Average Age
18	89	46.52271

The **age** of survey respondents ranged from 18 to 89, with the average respondent being 47 years old (see Table 5).

Many respondents fell within the 25-43 age range, as visible in Figure 1. Figure 1 suggests that the number of teenagers (18 and 19 year olds) who responded to the survey was on the lower end, but quickly rose as respondents entered their 20s and moved toward the age of 25. The number of respondents by age tapered off the older they indicated they were, starting around age 50.

3.2 Perceptions of Women in Politics

Despite the biased wording of GSS' women in politics survey question, respondents largely disagreed that men are generally better emotionally suited than women to serve in politics. 74.3% of respondents, spanning 1974-2022, disagree with the question, while 25.7% agree. We can see in Table 6 that women disagree with the question at a higher rate (41.9%), compared to men (32.3%). Table 6 also highlights that women agree with the question at a slightly higher rate than men (13.8% compared to 11.8%). 8 people (0.0%) agreed with the question without sharing their **gender**, while 42 people (0.1%) disagreed.

Figure 2 illustrates how perceptions of women in politics by **gender** have risen and fallen over time. We can see that both men and women agreed the most frequently with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women in 1975, 1977, and 1978 and disagreed the most frequently with this premise in 2021 and 2022. The 1985 and 1986 surveys witnessed an increase of both men and women who agree with the women in politics question, then another increase of women who agree with the question in the 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2000 surveys. The number of both men and women who agreed with the women in politics question rose again slightly in 2006 and 2016. Despite slight fluctuations in more recent years, the number of respondents who agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited

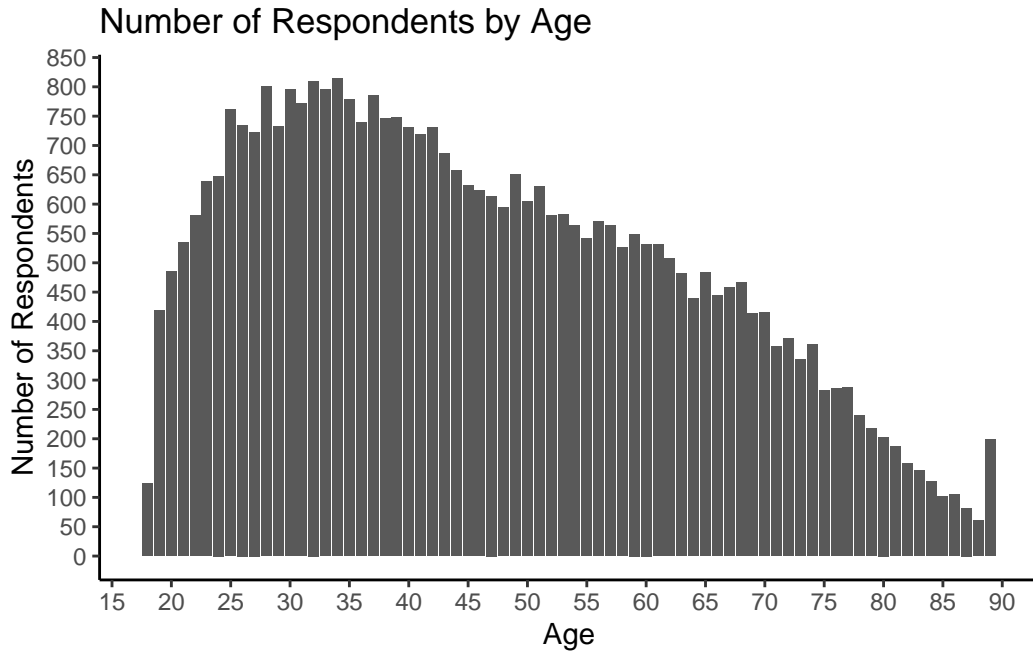


Figure 1: Number of Respondents by Age

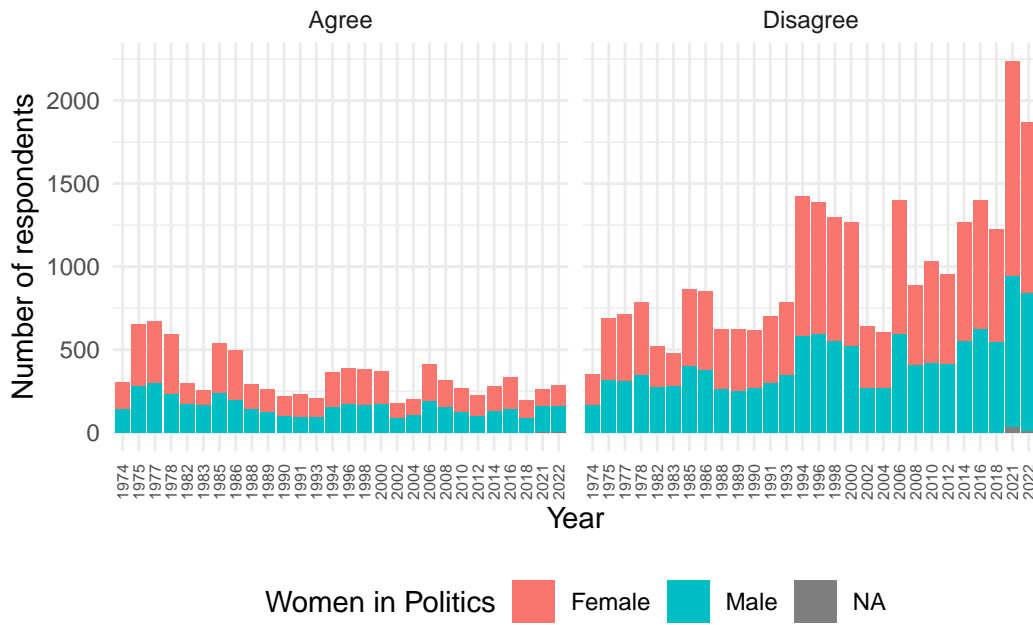


Figure 2: Women in Politics by Year & Gender

Table 6: Perceptions of Women in Politics

Women in Politics	Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Agree	Female	5118	13.8%
Agree	Male	4377	11.8%
Agree	NA	8	0.0%
Disagree	Female	15491	41.9%
Disagree	Male	11969	32.3%
Disagree	NA	42	0.1%

for politics has never reached the same levels as when GSS began asking this question in the 1970s.

The number of respondents by **gender** who disagree with the women in politics question has fluctuated slightly less over time (see Figure 2). The 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2000 surveys saw an increase in the number of women and men who disagree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics, along with 2006 and 2016.

Perceptions of women in politics by **age** has also varied over time, as emphasized by Figure 3. People between the ages of 25 and 45 disagree most frequently with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics, with people who identified as being 34 years old disagreeing most strongly. People between the ages of 20 and 25 and 45 and 65 also disagreed with the women in politics question at similar rates.

Moreover, Figure 3 shows that the number of people who agree with the women in politics question remains relatively the same by age.

3.3 Political Views

Responses to the women in politics question varies by **political views**, with people who identify as having more liberal views disagreeing, people with more conservative views agreeing, and people with more moderate views falling in the middle of liberal- and conservative-minded people (see Figure 4). Liberal views refers to anyone who self-identified in GSS as having **slightly liberal**, **liberal**, or **extremely liberal** views. Conservative views accounts for anyone who self-identified as having **slightly conservative**, **conservative**, or **extremely conservative** views.

As outlined in Table 7, we can see that 1,965 people (18.6%) who self-identify as holding **liberal** views agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics, while 8,625 people (81.4%) disagree with the premise. Of the people who agree, 975 (9.2%) identify as female, 988 (9.3%) identify as male, and 2 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

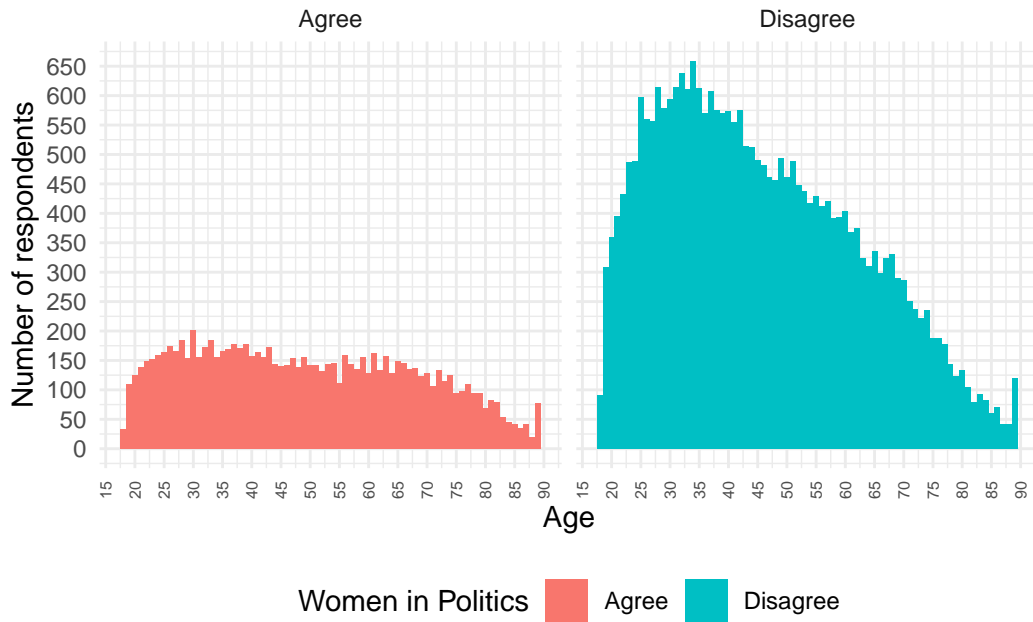


Figure 3: Women in Politics by Age

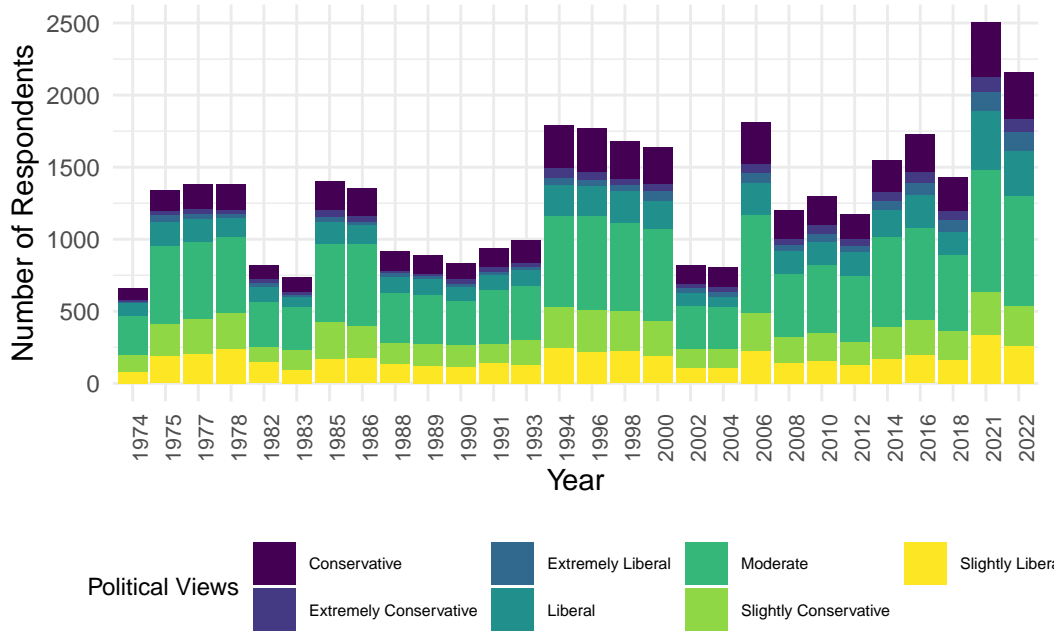


Figure 4: Responses to Women in Politics by All Political Views

Table 7: Responses to Women in Politics by Political Views- Liberal

Women in Politics	Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Agree	Female	975	9.2%
Agree	Male	988	9.3%
Agree	NA	2	0.0%
Disagree	Female	4999	47.2%
Disagree	Male	3619	34.2%
Disagree	NA	7	0.1%

Table 8: Responses to Women in Politics by Political Views- Conservative

Women in Politics	Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Agree	Female	2069	16.6%
Agree	Male	1943	15.6%
Agree	NA	3	0.0%
Disagree	Female	4377	35.1%
Disagree	Male	4079	32.7%
Disagree	NA	16	0.1%

Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,999 people (47.2%) identify as female, 3,619 identify as male (34.2%), and 7 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

Table 8 highlights that 4,015 people (32.2%) who self-identify as holding **conservative** views agree with the premise of the women in politics question, while 8,472 people (67.8%) who self-identify as holding conservative views disagree with the women in politics question. Of the people who agree, 2,069 (16.6%) identify as female, 1,943 (15.6%) identify as male, and 3 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,377 people (35.1%) identify as female, 4,079 identify as male (32.7%), and 16 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

Lastly, we can see in Table 9 that among people who self-identify as holding **moderate** views, 3,523 people (25.3%) agree with the women in politics question while 10,405 people (74.7%) disagree. Of the people who agree, 2,074 (14.9%) identify as female, 1,446 (10.4%) identify as male, and 3 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 6,115 people (43.9%) identify as female, 4,271 identify as male (30.7%), and 19 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

Table 9: Responses to Women in Politics by Political Views- Moderate

Women in Politics	Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Agree	Female	2074	14.9%
Agree	Male	1446	10.4%
Agree	NA	3	0.0%
Disagree	Female	6115	43.9%
Disagree	Male	4271	30.7%
Disagree	NA	19	0.1%

Table 10: Responses to Women in Politics by Party Identification- Democrat

Women in Politics	Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Agree	Female	2286	12.7%
Agree	Male	1857	10.3%
Agree	NA	3	0.0%
Disagree	Female	8278	46.0%
Disagree	Male	5578	31.0%
Disagree	NA	13	0.1%

3.4 Party Identification

Responses to the question whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women varies by American political **party identification**. People who self-identify as aligning with the Democrats disagree at a higher percent than people who self-identify as aligning with the Republicans (see Figure 5). Aligning with the Democrats refers to anyone who self-identified in GSS as **Strong Democrat**, **Not Strong Democrat**, or **Independent, Close to Democrat**. Aligning with the Republicans accounts for anyone who self-identified as **Strong Republican**, **Not Strong Republican**, or **Independent, Close to Republican**. **Independent** refers to people who self-identify with neither the Democrats or Republicans and **Other** accounts for people who align with a third party or candidate.

Table 10 reveals that 4,146 people (23%) who self-identify as aligning with the **Democrats** agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women, while 13,869 people (77%) who self-identify as being affiliated with the Democrats disagree with the premise. Of the people who agree, 2,286 (12.7%) identify as female, 1,857 (10.3%) identify as male, and 3 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 8,278 people (46.0%) identify as female, 5,578 identify as male (31.0%), and 13 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

As illustrated by Table 11, 4,121 people (31.8%) who self-identify as being affiliated with the

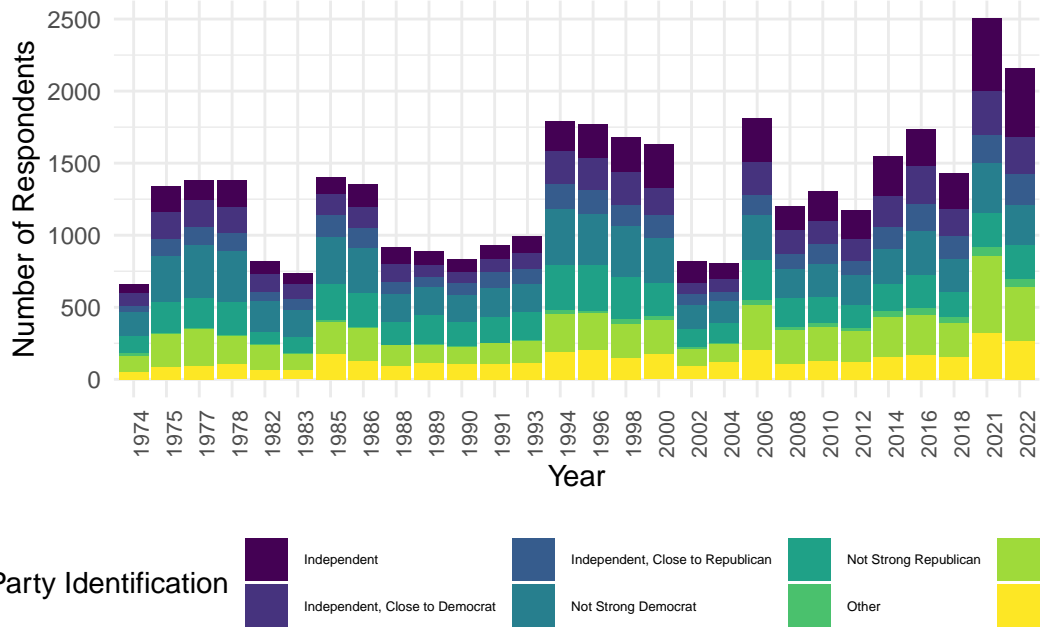


Figure 5: Responses to Women in Politics by All Party Identifications

Republicans agree with the women in politics question, while 8,853 people (68.2%) disagree with the question. Of the people who agree, 2,174 (16.8%) identify as female, 1,994 (15.0%) identify as male, and 3 (0.0%) opted not to identify their **gender**. Of those who disagree with the women in politics question, 4,586 people (35.3%) identify as female, 4,256 identify as male (32.8%), and 11 (0.1%) opted not to identify their **gender**.

Table 12 shows that 1,128 people (20.8%) agree with the women in politics question while 4,294 people (79.2%) who self-identify as being **independent** from a political party disagree. The break down by gender of those who agree is 619 women (11.4%), 507 men (9.4%), and 2

Table 11: Responses to Women in Politics by Party Identification- Republican

Women in Politics	Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Agree	Female	2174	16.8%
Agree	Male	1944	15.0%
Agree	NA	3	0.0%
Disagree	Female	4586	35.3%
Disagree	Male	4256	32.8%
Disagree	NA	11	0.1%

Table 12: Responses to Women in Politics by Party Identification- Independent

Women in Politics	Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Agree	Female	619	11.4%
Agree	Male	507	9.4%
Agree	NA	2	0.0%
Disagree	Female	2423	44.7%
Disagree	Male	1855	34.2%
Disagree	NA	16	0.3%

Table 13: Responses to Women in Politics by Party Identification- Other

Women in Politics	Gender	Number of Responses	Percentage
Agree	Female	39	6.6%
Agree	Male	69	11.6%
Disagree	Female	204	34.3%
Disagree	Male	280	47.1%
Disagree	NA	2	0.3%

(0.0%) opted not to share their **gender**. Of the people who disagree, 2,423 (44.7%) identify as female, 1,888 (34.2%) identify as male, and 16 (0.3%) opted not to share their **gender**.

Finally, Table 13 demonstrates that 486 people (81.8%) who self-identify as being affiliated with a third party disagree with the women in politics question while 108 people (18.2%) agree with the question. Of the people who agree, 39 (6.6%) identify as female and 69 (11.6%) identify as male. The break down by gender of those who disagree is 204 women (34.3%), 280 men (47.1%), and 2 (0.3%) opted not to share their **gender**.

4 Discussion

Overall, the data reveals that despite gendered framing by the traditional media, the American public largely sees women as being emotionally fit to serve as elected officials (74.3% of respondents in Table 6 believe women are emotionally fit). Support for women in politics by gender has risen and fallen over time, potentially responding to election candidates and important news stories of the times (see Figure 2). With nearly three quarters of respondents disagreeing with the premise that men are more emotionally fit than women for politics, it is important to consider other factors that may be holding us back from achieving gender equality.

4.1 Perceptions of Women in Politics by Demographic Factors

As hypothesized, women disagree with the question of whether men are emotionally suited for politics than them at a high rate (see Table 6). It is noteworthy that women also agree with the question at a slightly higher rate than men (13.8% versus 11.8%). Respondents between the ages of 25 and 45 were identified as being the most supportive of women in politics, which aligns with what is known about the political views and party identifications of people of those ages (see Figure 3).

4.2 Perceptions of Women in Politics by Political Views

The number of people with **liberal** views who disagree with the question that men are emotionally better suited for politics than women is comparable to the hypothesized number, while the people with **conservative** views who agree is not as high as anticipated, but still aligns with my hypothesis (see Table 9). My hypothesis did not account for people with **moderate** views as the way people with moderate views feel about specific policy issues and survey questions is not consistent nor aligns with a single political party. However, in the case of the women in politics survey question, the people who identified as moderate aligned in the middle of people with liberal and conservative views.

4.2.1 Perceptions of Women in Politics - Moderates versus Liberals & Conservatives

Defining a “moderate” voter in American politics proves challenging and is a weakness of this survey (further discussed in [Limitations](#)). Scholars view moderates as not simply holding “middle of the road views”, rather sharing views with either liberals or conservatives on occasion if the social, economic, or political context aligns with their beliefs (Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner 2012). Data from GSS reveals that people with moderate views fall in between people with liberal views and people with conservative views when both agreeing and disagreeing with the women in politics question. We can see in Figure 6 that people with moderate views and people with liberal views hold somewhat similar views to the women in politics question (74.7% versus 81.4%). When broken down by gender, 47.2% of liberal-identifying women disagree with the women in politics question (Table 7), while 43.9% of moderate-identifying women disagree (Table 9). 34.2% of liberal-identifying men disagree, while 30.7% of moderate-identifying men disagree. Moreover, 9.2% of liberal-identifying women agree, while 14.9% of moderate-identifying women agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics. 9.3% of liberal-identifying men agree, while 10.4% of moderate-identifying men agree. In these circumstances, when analyzed by gender, the gap between people with liberal and moderate views closes slightly.

In contrast, Figure 7 highlights that people with moderate views and people with conservative views also hold somewhat similar beliefs (74.7% versus 67.8%). When broken down by gender,

35.1% of conservative-identifying women disagree with the women in politics question (Table 8), while 43.9% of moderate-identifying women disagree (Table 9). 32.7% of conservative-identifying men disagree, while 30.7% of moderate-identifying men disagree. Moreover, 16.6% of conservative-identifying women agree, while 14.9% of moderate-identifying women agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics. 15.6% of conservative-identifying men agree, while 10.4% of moderate-identifying men agree. When analyzed by gender, the gap between people with conservative and moderate views aligns a little more closely, especially the number of women who agree with the premise that men are emotionally better suited for politics. A larger number of conservative-identifying men agree than moderate-identifying men with the women in politics question.

While there is often significant disagreement between liberals, conservatives, and sometimes moderates in American politics, it is noteworthy that moderates generally hold “middle of the road views” on this question (Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner 2012).

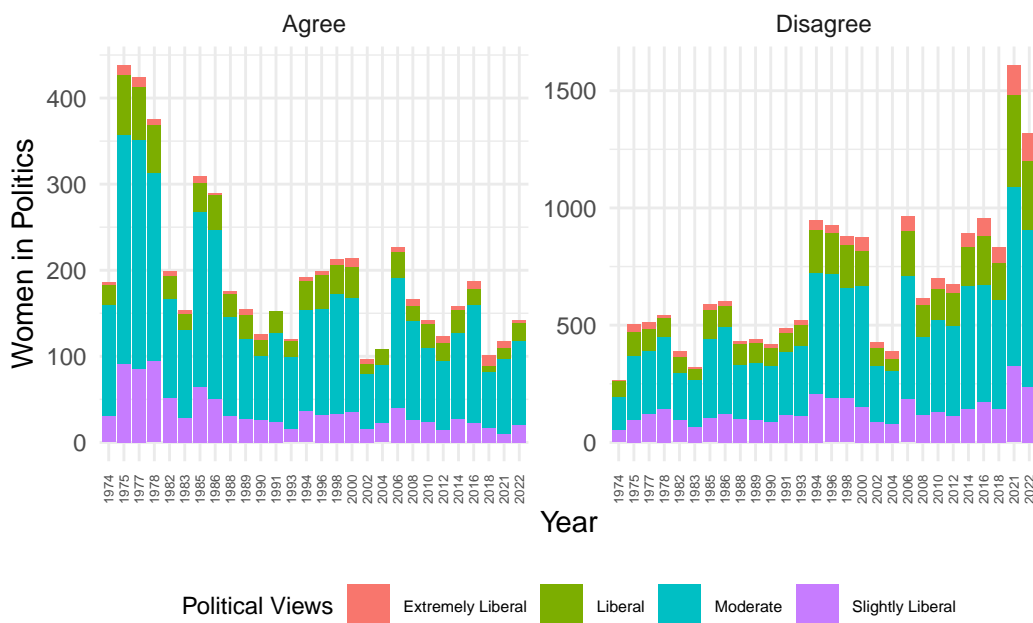


Figure 6: Comparing Moderate & Liberal Perceptions of Women in Politics

4.3 Perceptions of Women in Politics by Party Identification

Despite assumptions and previous research, this GSS data illustrates that perceptions of the emotional viability of women to serve in politics matches political party stances (Democrat and Republican) on the matter, but the results are not as negative and that public is more supportive of women running for elected office than anticipated. The support of women in

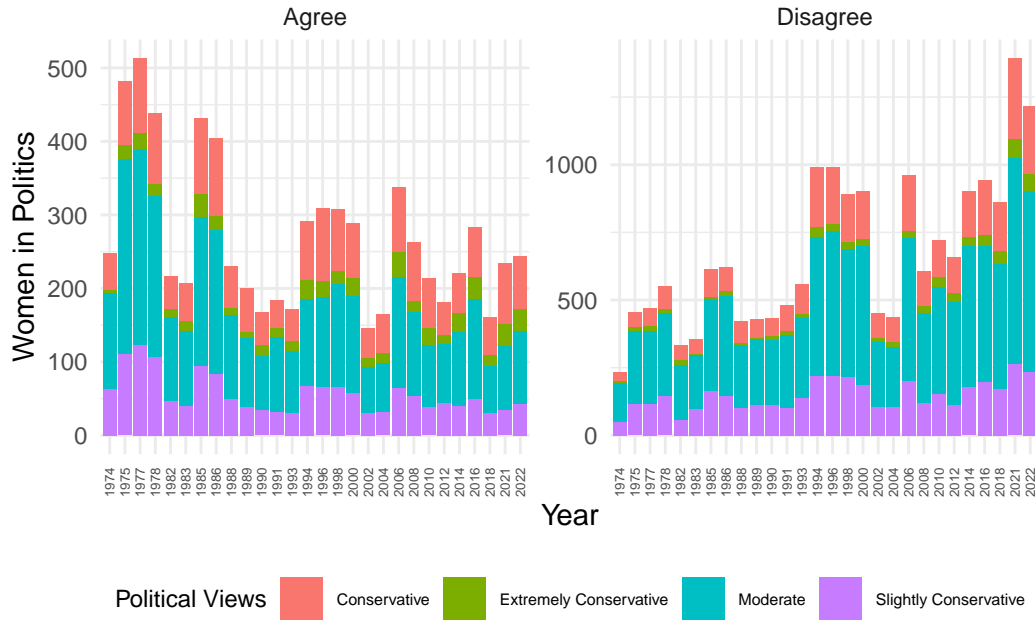


Figure 7: Comparing Moderate & Conservative Perceptions of Women in Politics

politics falls along party lines and is more positive than the ratios of women elected to the House of Representatives and the Senate from each party. Currently, there are 92 Democrat women (21%) and 33 Republican women (8%) elected to the House of Representatives (which has 435 members in total) (American Women and Politics 2023). There are 15 Democrat women (15%), 9 Republican women (9%), and 1 Independent woman (1%) elected to the Senate (which has 100 members in total) (American Women and Politics 2023).

4.4 Limitations

Asking people about their political views and potential party affiliation remain sensitive topics, despite progress made since the 1970s. As a result, some people may not be comfortable answering these questions which limits the diversity in potential responses collected by GSS. Furthermore, previous research has shown that people may mask their true beliefs when asked about topics such as the viability of women to serve in elected office (Holman 2023), which could impact the quality of the data collected and number of “NA” and “don’t know” answers. Ambiguous survey question response options, such as **moderate** (from the political views question) should be clarified to avoid respondents from making an uninformed decision, thus impacting the quality of the data.

Politics and political views are much more nuanced than simply selecting “agree” or “disagree” on a survey, so without an opportunity for people to explain their views through an open-ended

text box, important information which helps contextualize why they do or do not believe women are emotionally viable to serve in elected office is missed.

Despite the changing variable names to account for newer survey methods, the question asking whether men are emotionally better suited for politics than women harkens back to the 1970s, despite the strides being made toward gender equality in American politics. The phrasing of the question asking whether men are better emotionally suited is a leading question which is biased and primes the respondent to think about women in a specific way. Women are framed by traditional media and those on social media as being emotional, high strung, and not possessing “manly” leadership skills, so asking whether men are more emotionally suited over women reinforces traditional media framing and stereotypes (Courtemanche and Connor Green 2020) (Bashevkin 2009). The media never asks men about their emotions or covers their behaviour in the public eye through the lens of being emotional and the same should be expected for the media coverage of women in politics. GSS should consider asking respondents in future iterations of the survey about leadership qualities, relevant experience, and ability to address crucial policy areas. Questions such as these are addressed in the supplement survey in the [Appendix](#). The phrasing of the women in politics survey question does not account for current progress made toward gender equality, nor today’s hybrid media environment and the role that social media plays in disseminating political rhetoric and shaping the image of political candidates. It is challenging to know the extent of which these factors impact GSS’ data and should be accounted for in upcoming iterations of the survey.

Finally, GSS’ changing sampling methodology over time may have lead to the imbalance of respondents by **gender** (previously seen in Table 4). This imbalance means that people who self-identify as female are represented at a slightly higher rate than people who self-identify as male, meaning readers should be aware when drawing conclusions about gendered perceptions of women in politics. Furthermore, other changes in methodology due to the Covid-19 pandemic may have impacted more recent responses, especially since access to reliable internet, cell phone service, and technological literacy are not a given among all people.

4.5 Future Research

4.5.1 Supplemental Survey

The acceptance of women as political leaders depends on several factors beyond their perceived emotional qualities. Therefore, I prepared a supplemental survey (available in the [Appendix](#)) to ask respondents about other factors that could impact their views and provide space for further contextualization.

Previous research reveals that other perceived qualities about political candidates (especially female candidates) such as their leadership skills, highest level of education attained, and their ability to manage “serious” policy issues such as the economy can impact their electoral

chances (Courtemanche and Connor Green 2020). Accordingly, the supplemental survey includes questions such as “*Do you think women possess the leadership skills required to serve in elected office?*”, “*Does the gender of a candidate matter more than their policies?*”, and “*What is the most important factor when deciding which candidate to support in an election?*” I hypothesize that perceived leadership skills and the ability to manage important policy issues impact whether respondents decide to vote for female candidates.

As well, I would like to find out more from respondents, through the question “*Is the current political climate supportive of women seeking elected office?*”, if the political climate is perceived as part of the problem with achieving gender equality. Responses to this question can also inform directions for future studies.

4.5.2 Further Studies

There are many socio-economic, cultural, and demographic factors beyond an individual’s age and gender that inform voting behaviours and perceptions of what constitutes a good political candidate. Consequently, future research should look at the intersection of race and identity, income, and highest level of education attained with these questions about political views, party identification, and the emotional viability of women to run for office.

If media framing and political rhetoric are not solely shaping public attitudes towards women in politics, then what is causing the low success rate of electing women to office? Future studies should analyze political party structures, including candidate recruitment, the workplace culture in city halls, state legislatures, the House of Representatives, and the Senate, and the role of social media to help understand and correct course.

A specific future study should investigate the intersection of political views, party identification, and the emotional viability of women to run for office questions with respondents’ voting intentions and voting outcomes during the 2016 presidential election which saw Hillary Clinton (Democrat) face off against Donald Trump (Republican). The GSS variables `vote16`, `pres16`, and `if16who` could provide interesting data and insights (NORC 2022a).

5 Conclusion

Utilizing data from the U.S. General Social Survey, this paper analyzed perceptions of the emotional viability of women to serve in politics by political views and party identification over time from 1974 to 2022, in correlation with demographic factors such as gender and age. My results reveal that despite gendered media framing, the American public is generally supportive of women seeking elected office. People self-identifying as Democrats and people with liberal and liberal-learning political views are more supportive of women in politics. However, the number of people who self-identify as Republicans and people with conservative and conservative-learning political views were more supportive of women in politics than

anticipated. People who self-identified as having Moderate views hold “middle of the road” beliefs in response to the women in politics question, falling approximately between those with self-identified liberal and self-identified conservative views. In future studies, demographic factors such as race, income, and highest level of education attained must be analyzed to understand their intersection with perceptions of women in politics. While media framing and corresponding public perceptions may not be as large of a problem as anticipated, we must work to understand all contributing factors to the low success rate of electing women to the top political offices in the U.S., Canada, and across the world. We cannot let gender equality take another 100 years of hard-fought victories to materialize (Forum 2022).

Appendix

The supplemental survey is available here: <https://forms.gle/EFj72QiGS3fo186z5>

5.1 Survey Preamble

The General Social Survey collects information and maintains a historical record of respondents’ attitudes, experiences, concerns, and practices. In order to strengthen the understanding of perceptions of women in politics, these questions are designed to better understand what socio-economic, cultural, and political factors and conditions contribute to a person’s notion of whether women are fit to serve in elected political office, lead efforts to advance specific policy agendas, and increase the number of women elected to all levels of government.

This survey is voluntary and responses are anonymous. If you decide to participate, you can skip questions and withdraw at any time. Individual responses will be recorded in my data set using a user identification number.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please contact inessa.deangelis@mail.utoronto.ca if you have questions or require any further information.

5.2 Survey Questions

(1) If you identify as a visible minority, what is your specific group?

-Black

-Chinese

-Filipino

-Japanese

-Korean

-South Asian-East Indian

-Southeast Asian

-North African

-Arab

-I do not identify as a visible minority

-Other (please specify)

(2) What town or city do you live in?

(short answer text)

(3) What state do you live in?

(short answer text)

(4) How often do you engage with politics and political content?

-Daily

-A few times a week

-A few times a month

-Rarely

-Never

(5) Where do you go to seek out political content?

-Social media

-Traditional media

-Events

-Other

(6) Does the gender of a candidate matter more than their political affiliations?

-Yes

-No

-Indifferent

(7) Does the gender of a candidate matter more than their political ideology?

-Yes

-No

-Indifferent

(8) Does the gender of a candidate matter more than their policies?

-Yes

-No

-Indifferent

(9) What is the most important factor when deciding which candidate to support in an election?

-Gender

-Personal characteristics

-Leadership skills

-Ideology

-Political affiliation

-Policies

-Other

(10) Do you think women possess the leadership skills required to serve in elected office?

-Yes

-No

(11) Do you think women can effectively manage political policies?

-Yes

-No

(12) Is the current political climate supportive of women seeking elected office?

-Yes

-No

-Somewhat

5.3 Submission Message

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers will help expand our understanding of perceptions of women in politics.

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