

BOOK REVIEW

***The Partisan Gap: Why Democratic Women Get Elected but Republican Women Don't.* By Laurel Elder. New York: New York University Press. 240 pp. \$89.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9781479804818; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN: 9781479804825.**

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doi:10.1017/S1743923X23000016

Many gender politics scholars have noted the growing discrepancy in political representation between Democratic and Republican women since the 1990s, but no one has studied it as thoroughly as Laurel Elder. In *The Partisan Gap*, Elder provides a structural and historical analysis of the parties to understand why Republican women are less likely than Democratic women to be represented in elected office. The book is both accessible and comprehensive, focusing on women's representation at the state and national levels across time.

In Chapter 1, Elder describes the four theoretical frameworks she uses throughout the book to explore the causes of the partisan gap: ideological polarization; regional realignment; the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and partisanship; and party culture. She argues that asymmetric polarization has resulted in an especially challenging political environment for Republican women, who tend to be more moderate than Republican men. On issues related to gender, more specifically, the GOP's stances have evolved to explicitly reject women's rights and feminism, embracing more traditional gender roles. One result is that Republican women are less likely to feel encouraged to run for office or to be in professions that have typically functioned as springboards to elected office.

The second framework is the regional realignment of the parties. Over the course of the last half of the twentieth century, the geographic bases of Democratic and Republican parties have shifted: the Democratic Party lost ground in the South, gaining power in the Northeast and West, while the Republican Party has created a stronghold in the South. The political cultures of these regions, Elder argues, affect the emergence of women candidates; as the Northeast and West have tended to be more welcoming to women candidates, we have seen a steady increase in Democratic women elected officials.

The third framework focuses on the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and partisanship. The Voting Rights Act and the racial realignment of the parties

over time has created more opportunities for women of color in the Democratic Party. As the Republican Party has embraced white identity politics, the vast majority BIPOC members of Congress have been Democrats. Elder expertly shows throughout the book how race and gender interact in ways that help explain the disproportionate underrepresentation of Republican women in American politics.

The final theoretical framework employed by Elder is party culture. Rather than being mirror images of one another, the Democratic and Republican parties have distinct internal structures and cultures. Elder contends that the hierarchical structure and individualistic culture of the Republican Party (compared with the more group-based culture of the Democratic Party) makes the recruitment of women candidates less of a priority for Republican Party leaders.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Elder applies these theoretical frameworks to her empirical analyses of women's representation in state legislatures and Congress, respectively. Using data from the Center for American Women and Politics and the National Conference of State Legislatures, she skillfully demonstrates how these four frameworks have contributed to the partisan gap at both the state and national levels. Connecting the findings in these two chapters, Elder also shows that the advancement to Congress from state legislatures has been most significant for Republican women. That is, Republican women are more reliant on the state legislative pipeline than Democratic women or men of either party, suggesting that Republican women's underrepresentation in state legislatures affects their underrepresentation in Congress.

In Chapter 4, Elder shows how the distinct cultures of the parties affect the recruitment of women congressional candidates. Drawing on interviews with women party leaders, elected officials, candidates, and campaign staff, as well as analyses of documents from parties and affiliated organizations, this chapter offers unique insight into the experiences of women in each of the parties. While Democratic women are supported by an extended network of successful women's organizations, the same cannot be said for Republican women. Republican women's organizations and party initiatives alike have been relatively ineffective compared to Democratic women's groups like EMILY's List, in large part due to the GOP's individualistic culture and rejection of group-based claims.

Elder's concluding chapter highlights the substantive impact of women's presence (and absence) in political institutions. Although many Republican women reject the concept of "women's issues," they nevertheless believe that women bring unique and important perspectives to the party. As Elder underscores, the dearth of women's voices in the Republican Party has policy implications at the state and federal levels as well as normative implications for democratic representation more broadly.

This book makes vital contributions to the gender politics literature. Elder's emphasis on historical, structural, and cultural factors suggests that addressing the partisan gap among women will require more than individual political ambition or candidate recruitment; it will also require changes to a Republican Party culture that has been shaped over the course of many decades. This contribution broadens the conversation around women's representation in American politics.

Especially notable is Elder's qualitative work, which centers the experiences of women in party politics and makes visible the challenges that many—including Democratic women of color—still face. While addressing the partisan gap is critical, it is also important to remember that women have not yet reached parity in *either* party. Examining the unique pathways to leadership for women in each party remains an important endeavor for scholars, and Elder shows how interview data can be used to capture those experiences.

This book is comprehensive in that it explores women's representation in both major political parties and at multiple levels of government. Elder's multi-method analysis empirically demonstrates how the parties have evolved over time and how that evolution has shaped the political experiences of women. Despite its complexity, the book is accessible and easy to follow. *The Partisan Gap* would therefore be an excellent addition to syllabi in graduate and undergraduate courses. It is an essential read for gender politics scholars and anyone else who is concerned about our current state of democracy.

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