

# Individual and PAC Giving to Women Candidates

November 2016

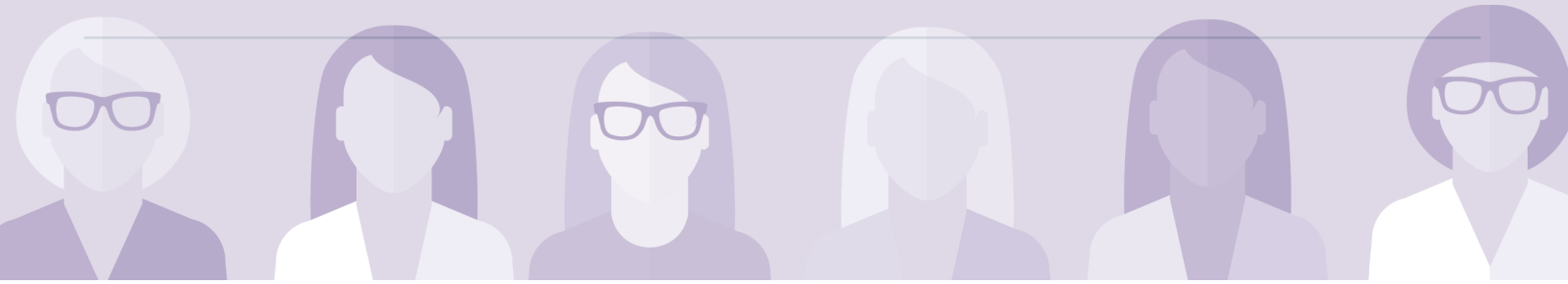


## Individual and PAC Giving to Women Candidates

Individual and PAC Giving to Women Candidates is part of a collaborative project between the Center for Responsive Politics, Common Cause and Representation2020.



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The Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), Common Cause and Representation2020 have teamed up to explore political giving to congressional candidates from the female candidate's perspective. This collaborative project is designed to create greater transparency on how political giving affects the universe of viable candidates, to draw attention to the key gatekeeper role played by major campaign funders and to design strategies that encourage donors, PACs, political parties and others to reexamine how and when they give to female candidates.

**Our research reveals two key themes:**

1. PACs, membership PACs and leadership PACs underfund women running in open seats. This underfunding exists for both Republican and Democratic candidates.
2. Republican women face additional barriers when running for Congress. Small individual donors favor female candidates, but they do not make up the bulk of individual contributions. Among the top individual donors, Republican women receive the least funding on average. Additionally, proportionally more outside spending is directed at opposing Republican women than other candidates.

**In order to level the playing field for women candidates we recommend the following:**

1. Women should be encouraged to run for open seat races by political parties, donors, PACs and other gatekeepers
2. PACs, membership PACs, and leadership PACs should fund women in open seats races at the same rate they fund male candidates
3. PACs should set targets for the number of women candidates - especially Republican women candidates - increasing that target in each election cycle until parity is reached
4. PACs, like political parties, should consult with organizations that recruit and train women candidates to build the pool of candidates and design enforcement mechanisms
5. Donors should set targets for the number of women candidates they support - high impact donors should work in concert to publicize their commitment to women candidates
6. The public should hold PACs & donors accountable for meeting their targets through withholding gifts to PACs that don't meet their target and by rewarding those that do
7. The pool of women donors to campaigns should be expanded. Activists should encourage politically active women to donate to campaigns as well as run for office.



# Introduction

It is no secret that women are underrepresented in politics. After the 2016 Election, women still make up less than 20% of Congress (around one-third of Democratic-held seats and one in ten Republican-held seats). While there has been some improvement (women made up 13% of Congress after the 2000 election), it has come in fits and starts.

Fundraising, and raising lots of funds, are high priorities for sitting and aspiring members of Congress alike. Though political scientists dispute the impact campaign spending has on electoral outcomes, the viability of a candidate is often evaluated in part by her fundraising ability. Any systemic disparity in political giving to female candidates might translate into fewer viable female candidates and, in turn, to congressional underrepresentation.

*She Should Run*, working with the *Center for Responsive Politics*, [has already shown](#) that women lag behind men in political giving (contributing just 26 cents for every dollar contributed by men to federal candidates, political action committees (PACs), and party committees in the 2010 cycle).<sup>1</sup> This report, the result of a collaborative project between the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), Common Cause, and Representation2020, explores whether systemic patterns of underfunding exist for female candidates, particularly in open seats where women have the greatest chance to pick up a seat and thus improve female representation in Congress.

We examine four streams of political contributions to female candidates for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate in the 2010, 2012, 2014 and (where available) 2016 cycles:

- Direct giving from individual donors
- PAC giving
- Leadership PAC giving
- Outside spending by party committees and Super PACs.

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## **Two key themes emerged in our research:**

1. Successful challenges for an incumbent's seat are rare, such that victory in open seats is the central means by which to increase the number of women in Congress. Yet both membership PACs and leadership PACs systematically underfund women running in open seats.
2. Republican women face additional hurdles as candidates. They receive proportionally less funds from top individual donors and have to face more outside spending opposing them than other candidates.

## **Our research shows:**

1. Overall, individual donors, while much less likely to be female themselves, give equally to male and female congressional candidates, including in open seats.
2. Top Democratic women donors give proportionally more to female candidates than do top male Democratic donors. Gender does not appear to play a role among the largest individual Republican donors, with both male and female donors underfunding Republican women candidates.
3. PACs give fairly equitably to female incumbents and challengers, but underfund women running in open seats.
4. Membership PACs slightly underfund women, with a large deficit for women running in open seats.
5. Leadership PACs overfund incumbent women but, like other PACs, underfund women running in open seats.
6. A disproportionate amount of outside spending opposes Republican women.

## **In light of these findings, we recommend:**

1. Women should be encouraged to run for open seat races by political parties, donors, PACs, and other gatekeepers
2. PACs, membership PACs, and leadership PACs should fund women in open seats races at the same rate they fund male candidates
3. PACs should set targets for the number of women candidates - especially Republican women candidates - increasing that target in each election cycle until parity is reached
4. PACs, like political parties, should consult with organizations that recruit and train women candidates to build the pool of candidates and design enforcement mechanisms
5. Donors should set targets for the number of women candidates they support - high impact donors should work in concert to publicize their commitment to women candidates
6. The public should hold PACs & donors accountable for meeting their targets through withholding gifts to PACs that don't meet their target and by rewarding those that do
7. The pool of women donors to campaigns should be expanded

# Women as Congressional Candidates and Winners

## Candidates in open seats are most likely to be women

Women make up a minority of candidates to the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate (Figure 1). About half of all female candidates run as challengers, but around a quarter of challengers are women. Women are most prominent in open seats, where, since 2010, they have made up between 24% and 42% of all candidates running.

**Figure 1: Female U.S. Senate and House Major Party Candidates, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 Cycles (including primaries)**

	2010	2012	2014	2016
<b>Female candidates</b>				
- Number	<b>302</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>311</b>
- Percent	22%	25%	24%	26%
<b>Female incumbents<sup>2</sup></b>				
- Number	<b>75</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>78</b>
- Percent	18%	17%	18%	19%
<b>Female challengers</b>				
- Number	<b>165</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>154</b>
- Percent	23%	24%	26%	29%
<b>Female candidates in open seats</b>				
- Number	<b>62</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>79</b>
- Percent	24%	42%	30%	32%

Source: Center for American Women and Politics; Federal Election Commission

## Incumbents least likely to be women

In 2010, just 18% of incumbents were female; by 2016 this had risen to only 19%. The explanation for this lack of progress is simple: candidates can only become incumbents after first being a successful challenger or open seat contestant. While numerous, challengers are rarely successful, and open seats are few and far between. The exact numbers are difficult to confirm, but in 2014 around 5% of challengers defeated an incumbent in the general election and just 57 seats of the 476 (12%) U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and House delegate seats up for election were open contests.

## Few women candidates in the Republican Party

There is a clear partisan dimension to candidacy. Women are much less likely to be candidates for the Republican Party (Figure 2), with one-third of female candidates running on the Republican Party label in 2016. Rates of candidacy were much higher in the Democratic Party. In 2016, more than half (53%) of candidates running in open seats for the Democratic Party were women, compared to 19% for the Republican Party.

Republican women are most underrepresented among the ranks of incumbents (between 7% and 10% of Republican incumbents are women), and made up only 19% - 30% of Republicans running in open seats between 2010 and 2016.

**Figure 2: Female U.S. Senate and House Candidates by Political Party, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016 Cycles (including primaries)**

	Democratic Party				Republican Party			
	2010	2012	2014	2016	2010	2012	2014	2016
<b>Female candidates</b>								
- Number	155	205	171	206	148	119	108	105
- Percent	28%	33%	33%	37%	17%	17%	17%	16%
<b>Female incumbents</b>								
- Number	60	47	60	56	16	22	16	22
- Percent	33%	24%	30%	31%	7%	10%	7%	9%
<b>Female challengers</b>								
- Number	66	104	78	101	99	61	60	53
- Percent	24%	31%	35%	36%	38%	17%	20%	20%
<b>Female candidates in open seats</b>								
- Number	29	54	33	49	33	36	32	30
- Percent	31%	58%	34%	53%	21%	30%	26%	19%

Source: Center for American Women and Politics; Federal Election Commission

## Similar success rates for female and male candidates

In 2014, more than half of major party candidates for the general election won (Figure 3). Male and female rates of success were equal (52% to 53%). The high success rates reflect that there can be only two major party candidates for each seat, but it is significant that women candidates are no less likely to win in November. By contrast, 33% of female major party congressional candidates who ran in the primary won the general election, while 43% of male candidates did. This suggests that primary elections might be a chief barrier to women.

## Low rates of challenger success

Ninety-seven percent of incumbents won their congressional races in 2014. By contrast, only 2 of 138 (1%) of women mounting a primary campaign in a seat held by an incumbent won their races. This reflects that challenging an incumbent is a difficult, two-stage, task. It appears to be especially difficult for female candidates. Male challengers won at five times the rate of female challengers in 2014. Yet, even for men, success as a challenger is rare.

**Figure 3: Success Rate of Major Party Congressional Candidates, 2014 Cycle by Gender and Candidacy Type**

	All candidates		Candidates in the General Election	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Candidates</b>	279	885	178	719
Winning candidates	92	384	92	384
Success rate	33%	43%	52%	53%
<b>Incumbents</b>	77	341	77	339
Winning incumbents	76	331	76	331
Success rate	97%	97%	97%	98%
<b>Challengers</b>	138	391	75	284
Winning challengers	2	18	2	18
Success rate	1%	5%	3%	6%
<b>Candidates to open seats</b>	65	152	26	96
Winning candidates in open seats	14	43	14	43
Success rate	22%	28%	54%	45%

*Source: Center for American Women and Politics; Federal Election Commission*

### **Few open seats, but greater success in them**

The vast majority of seats in Congress are contested by an incumbent—only one in ten (12%) seats in the 2014 congressional election were open seats. One in five (22%) women who ran in a primary for an open seat won the general election (compared to one in four, 28% of men). Female candidates who made it to the general election in open seats were more likely to win than male candidates, with a success rate of 54% compared to 45% for men.

### **Victory in open seats is key**

The dismal rates of challenger success compared to the moderate rates of success in open seats suggest that, despite the relative rarity of open seats, victory in open seats remains the central means by which to increase the representation of women in Congress.



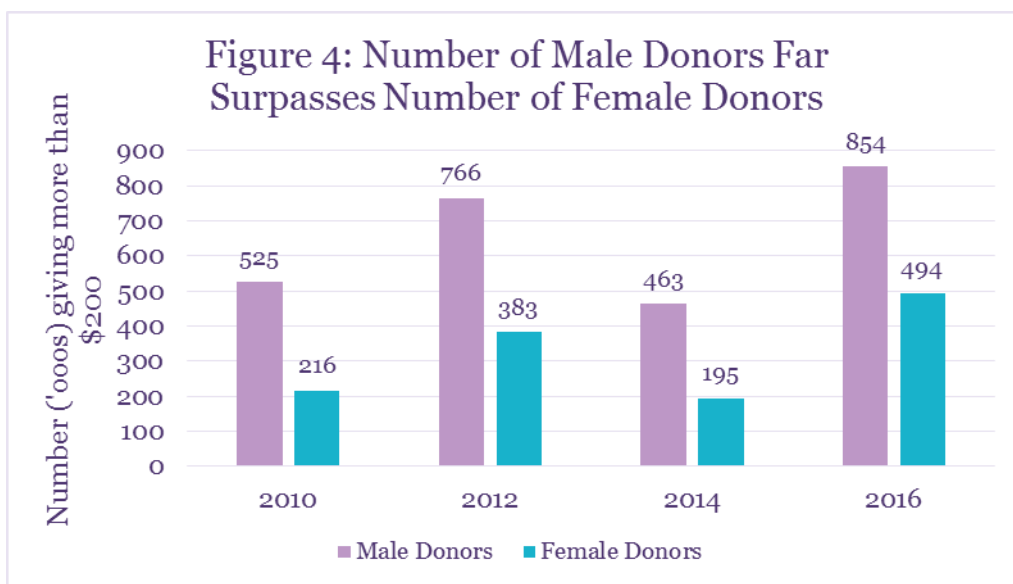
# Direct Giving: Individual Donor Giving

Candidates can raise money through direct donations from individuals. Each individual can only donate \$5,200 directly to a candidate each cycle.

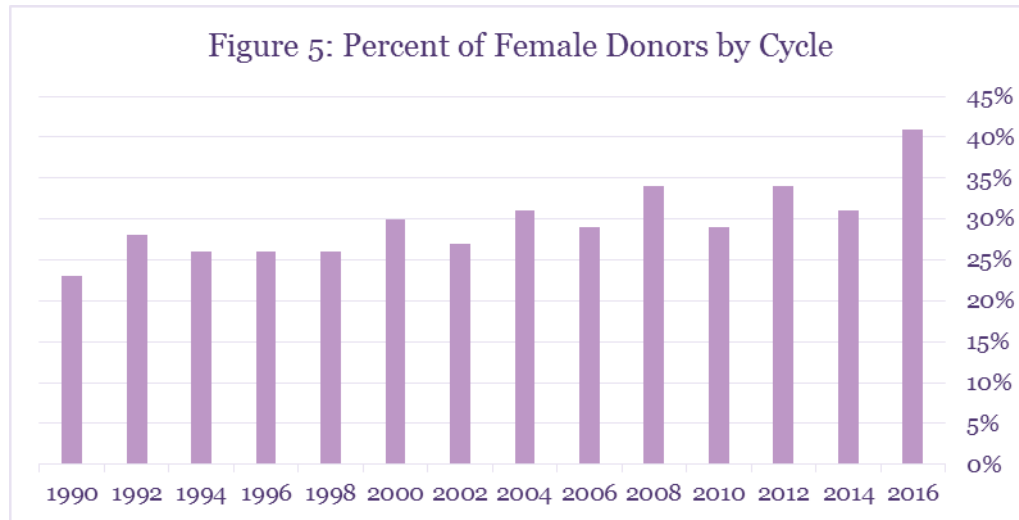
## Many more male donors

Male political donors greatly outnumber female donors, and they give more money. Typically about twice as many men make political donations as women (Figure 4). Data from the [Center for Responsive Politics](#) show that in 2016, 0.75% of all adult men gave over \$200 to a campaign, whereas 0.42% of women did.<sup>3</sup> Among larger donors, the disparity worsens: twice as many men (0.12%) gave over \$2,600 than women (0.06%) in 2016.

Source: Center for Responsive Politics



In 2016, women made up 41 percent of the overall donor pool, a number which has slowly increased since 1990, the earliest year the Center for Responsive Politics began collecting this data (Figure 5).



Source: Center for Responsive Politics

### Equitable giving by individual donors

Fortunately, the disparities between the genders in political giving do not translate into disparities in candidates receiving funds. As Figure 6 shows, on average, female candidates for the House of Representatives receive slightly more money from individual donors than male candidates (indicated by a ratio greater than 1). Both Republican and Democratic women received more money from individual donors than their male counterparts. Generally speaking female incumbents, challengers, and candidates in open seats all received more money from individual donors than their male counterparts. This is especially significant in the case of open seats, where, 2010 notwithstanding, donors appear to be equitably funding female candidates.

**Figure 6: Average Total Donations received from individual donors, Male and Female Congressional Candidates**

		2010	2012	2014
<b>All Candidates</b>	Male	\$673,951	\$663,208	\$618,348
	Female	\$746,930	\$783,645	\$670,173
	<i>Ratio of average receipts of female candidates</i>	1.1	1.2	1.1
<b>Incumbents</b>	Male	\$811,309	\$872,973	\$781,868
	Female	\$989,940	\$1,052,267	\$811,242
	<i>Ratio of average receipts of female candidates</i>	1.2	1.2	1.0
<b>Challengers</b>	Male	\$478,023	\$376,984	\$318,253
	Female	\$455,288	\$445,622	\$392,767
	<i>Ratio of average receipts of female candidates</i>	1.0	1.2	1.2
<b>Open Seats</b>	Male	\$805,096	\$658,110	\$779,250
	Female	\$710,618	\$1,002,666	\$1,130,625
	<i>Ratio of average receipts of female candidates</i>	0.9	1.5	1.5
<b>Republicans</b>	Male	\$682,585	\$722,291	\$654,782
	Female	\$831,139	\$1,038,396	\$662,545
	<i>Ratio of average receipts of female candidates</i>	1.2	1.4	1.0
<b>Democrats</b>	Male	\$663,423	\$586,998	\$572,126
	Female	\$702,954	\$682,196	\$673,601
	<i>Ratio of average receipts of female candidates</i>	1.1	1.2	1.2

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

### Small donors favor female candidates

Figure 7 shows that female candidates receive more money from both small and large donors. Their advantage is greatest among small donors, with the average female candidate receiving \$141,000 in small donations in 2014, compared to the average male candidate's \$86,000.

**Figure 7: Average total donations received from large and small individual donors<sup>4</sup>, Male and Female Congressional Candidates**

		2010	2012	2014
Large donors	Male Candidates	\$475,505	\$554,805	\$554,204
	Female Candidates	\$556,192	\$561,484	\$571,333
	<i>Ratio of average receipts of female candidates</i>	1.2	1.0	1.0
Small donors	Male Candidates	\$119,203	\$109,122	\$86,251
	Female Candidates	\$185,695	\$212,942	\$141,086
	<i>Ratio of average receipts of female candidates</i>	1.6	2.0	1.6

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

### Most top donors are male and give more to male candidates

*McCutcheon vs. FEC* allowed donors to contribute an unlimited amount of money to federal candidates in the aggregate, although donations to individual candidates are still regulated and capped at \$2,700 in 2016. This means that individual donors were able to contribute more “hard” money in the 2014 and 2016 cycles than they could in 2012.

Top candidate donors skew male. And, in 2012 and 2014, they contributed a larger proportion of their funds to male candidates than did female candidates. Top male donors contributed about 80% of their candidate money to male candidates. For top female donors, that figure was about 70% (Figure 8).

**Figure 8 Average total donations from top donors to male and female congressional candidates, by gender and cycle**

2012	To Male Candidates	To Female Candidates	% to Female Candidates	% of Candidates Female
Male Donors	\$72,207	\$16,017	18%	25%
Female Donors	\$59,984	\$29,568	33%	25%
2014				
Male Donors	\$100,972	\$24,798	20%	24%
Female Donors	\$93,487	\$35,049	27%	24%

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

### Republican women missing out

There are partisan implications here. Female top donors who donate to Democrats give more of their money to Democratic women candidates than they do to men, but the same is not true for women who donate to Republicans (Figure 9).

Republican women made up about 17% of candidates, but received 12% - 13% of top Republican donor funds. Top Republican donor women give as much money to male Republicans as their male counterparts. This provides evidence that Republican women face additional challenges when running for office, given that gender does not appear to be a driving factor in contributions by female Republicans. Democratic women, on the other hand, do seem to view gender as a compelling factor when making donation decisions, although other factors need to be considered before drawing this conclusion definitively.

**Figure 9: Average total donations from top donors to all male candidates vs. all female candidates, by gender, party and cycle**

2012	Amount to candidates				% to female candidates
	Female Democrat	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Male Republican	
<i>Donor (N)</i>					
Female Democrat (7)	\$47,628	\$27,484			63%
Male Democrat (41)	\$19,388	\$32,085			38%
Female Republican (10)			\$11,012	\$70,737	13%
Male Republican (74)			\$7,872	\$66,139	11%
2014					
<i>Donor (N)</i>					
Female Democrat (8)	\$65,805	\$59,768			52%
Male Democrat (42)	\$25,792	\$49,206			34%
Female Republican (16)			\$15,289	\$98,660	13%
Male Republican (62)			\$14,525	\$96,953	13%

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

### Attention should be drawn to the plight of Republican women candidates

In light of the findings that patterns in individual giving to candidates do not systematically favor men, except among Republican top donors, we suggest raising awareness, especially among top Republican women donors, of the underfunding of women Republican candidates.

## Women of Color Receive the Least From Donors

There are few women of color in Congress, and they tend to receive the least funds. In 2014, the average amount received from donors giving more than \$200 was lower for candidates of color, especially women. Female candidates of color received an average of around \$330,000, compared to around \$450,000 for men of color, and almost \$700,000 for white candidates of both genders (Figure 10). Democratic women candidates of color appear to receive less funds than Republican women of color, however the number of Republican women candidates of color is very small.

**Figure 10: Average Total Individual Donations to Congressional Candidates, by Race and Gender of Candidate, 2014 (donors giving more than \$200)**

	Average from Women	Average from Men	% from Women	N
Republican, Person of Color	\$188,725	\$602,552	23.85%	13
Democrat, Person of Color	\$97,764	\$248,369	28.24%	75
Republican, White	\$173,006	\$572,189	23.22%	234
Democrat, White	\$173,067	\$421,144	29.13%	117
Men, White	\$161,060	\$533,816	23.18%	294
Women, White	\$234,912	\$457,461	33.93%	55
Men, Person of Color	\$109,599	\$339,929	24.38%	56
Women, Person of Color	\$109,836	\$223,123	32.99%	31
Republican, Woman of Color	\$263,049	\$615,919	29.93%	3
Democrat, Woman of Color	\$98,587	\$192,314	33.89%	29
Republican, Woman, White	\$223,361	\$562,960	28.41%	19
Democrat, Woman, White	\$241,009	\$401,781	37.49%	36

*Source: Center for Responsive Politics*

Democrats tend to take slightly more (on average) from women than do Republicans, regardless of race. Women also take more from women than men, again, regardless of race. However, Democratic women take more on average than do Republican women from women donors, and Democratic white women take the largest percentage of their money from women donors.



# Indirect Giving: Political Action Committees

## Traditional PACs

**Political Action Committee (PAC)** is a broad term, encompassing a variety of different kinds of federal political organizations. In this section, we confine our attention to “traditional” PACs: PACs formed by organizations, whether corporations, unions or associations of like-minded individuals, for the purpose of contributing to candidate campaigns. In later sections, we consider Leadership PACs, as well as Super PACs (in the section on outside spending).

PACs can solicit \$5,000 a year from any individual and give only \$5,000 per candidate per election.

### **Traditional PACs contribute one tenth of all funds**

Traditional PACs are a reliable source of funding for members of Congress, although they usually do not contribute the majority of a candidate’s campaign cash. Traditional PACs contribute around \$450 million to U.S. House and U.S. Senate candidates each cycle. This amounts to around one tenth of the total money spent (around \$4 billion) by candidates, political parties and independent interest groups.

### **Traditional PACs underfund women in open seats**

Overall, PACs give slightly less to female candidates than male candidates, with less than one dollar in five going to female candidates (Figure 11). The disparity largely stems from a dearth of funding for female candidates in open seats. PACs consistently give around 18% of their funds in open seats to female candidates, but women make up significantly more than 18% of open seats candidates, such as in 2012 when women made up 42% of open seat candidates.

**Figure 11: PAC Giving to all U.S. Senate and House Candidates, 2010, 2012 and 2014 Cycles<sup>6</sup>**

		2010	2012	2014
All candidates	Percent of candidates female	22%	25%	24%
	Percent of PAC funds to female candidates	17%	19%	19%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Incumbents	Percent of candidates female	18%	17%	18%
	Percent of PAC funds to female candidates	18%	17%	17%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>
Challengers	Percent of candidates female	23%	24%	26%
	Percent of PAC funds to female candidates	19%	24%	24%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2%</b>
In open seats	Percent of candidates female	24%	42%	30%
	Percent of PAC funds to female candidates	17%	18%	18%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>12%</b>

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

### Membership PACs underfund women in open seats

When we limit our analysis to **membership PACs**,<sup>7</sup> the underfunding of women in open seats persists. Women’s share of membership PAC money has remained consistent in the last three cycles (between 18% and 20% of funds go to female candidates), which means they are slightly underfunded by membership PACs (Figure 12). This deficit is caused entirely by membership PACs’ underfunding of women in open seats.

**Figure 12: Membership PAC Giving to all U.S. Senate and House Candidates, 2010, 2012 and 2014 cycles**

		2010	2012	2014
All candidates	Percent of candidates female	22%	25%	24%
	Percent of PAC funds to female candidates	18%	20%	19%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Incumbents	Percent of candidates female	18%	17%	18%
	Percent of PAC funds to female candidates	19%	18%	17%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
Challengers	Percent of candidates female	23%	24%	26%
	Percent of PAC funds to female candidates	19%	25%	25%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
In open seats	Percent of candidates female	24%	42%	30%
	Percent of PAC funds to female candidates	14%	26%	27%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>3%</b>

Source: Center for Responsive Politics



## Membership PACs underfund women from both political parties in open seats

Breaking funding down by the political affiliation of the candidates (figures 13 and 14), membership PAC giving to Democratic women tends to over fund challengers, with 66% of funds for female candidates going to challengers in 2014 (possibly due to the high-profile challenge for Mitch McConnell’s Kentucky U.S. Senate seat by Alison Lundergan Grimes). In addition, proportionally less funds from membership PACs go to female candidates of both political persuasion in open seats.

**Figure 13: Membership PAC Giving to Democratic U.S. Senate and House Candidates, 2010, 2012 and 2014 cycles**

	<b>Democratic Party</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>All candidates</b>	Percent of candidates female	28%	33%	33%
	<i>Percent of Membership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	24%	29%	29%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Incumbents</b>	Percent of candidates female	33%	24%	30%
	<i>Percent of Membership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	23%	26%	27%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Challengers</b>	Percent of candidates female	24%	31%	35%
	<i>Percent of Membership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	31%	37%	66%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-7%</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>-31%</b>
<b>Open Seats</b>	Percent of candidates female	31%	58%	34%
	<i>Percent of Membership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	26%	35%	39%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>-5%</b>

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

**Figure 14: Membership PAC Giving to Republican U.S. Senate and House Candidates, 2010, 2012 and 2014 cycles**

		<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>All candidates</b>	Percent of candidates female	17%	17%	17%
	<i>Percent of Membership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	11%	12%	11%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Incumbents</b>	Percent of candidates female	7%	10%	7%
	<i>Percent of Membership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	10%	11%	9%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-2%</b>
<b>Challengers</b>	Percent of candidates female	38%	17%	20%
	<i>Percent of Membership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	18%	8%	12%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Open Seats</b>	Percent of candidates female	21%	30%	26%
	<i>Percent of Membership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	10%	20%	22%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>4%</b>

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

## We recommend publicizing the dearth of funds for women in open seats

In light of these data, we recommend attention be drawn to PACs’ underfunding of women of both political persuasions in open seats. Both the general public and PACs should be targeted with this message.



A particular emphasis could be on membership PACs, as their membership has the potential to influence the PAC's giving practices. Unlike other types of PACs, membership PACs are formed by organizations with a formal membership who have joined to further the organization's core goals, whether they be professional (as in the American Dental Association), ideological, or civic (the Sierra Club). Because members have power, there are the possibilities of appealing directly to members regarding improvements in campaign donating practices and using tactics like media campaigns to encourage members to pressure their PAC's management. Both these tasks might be more difficult in other types of elite-controlled PACs.

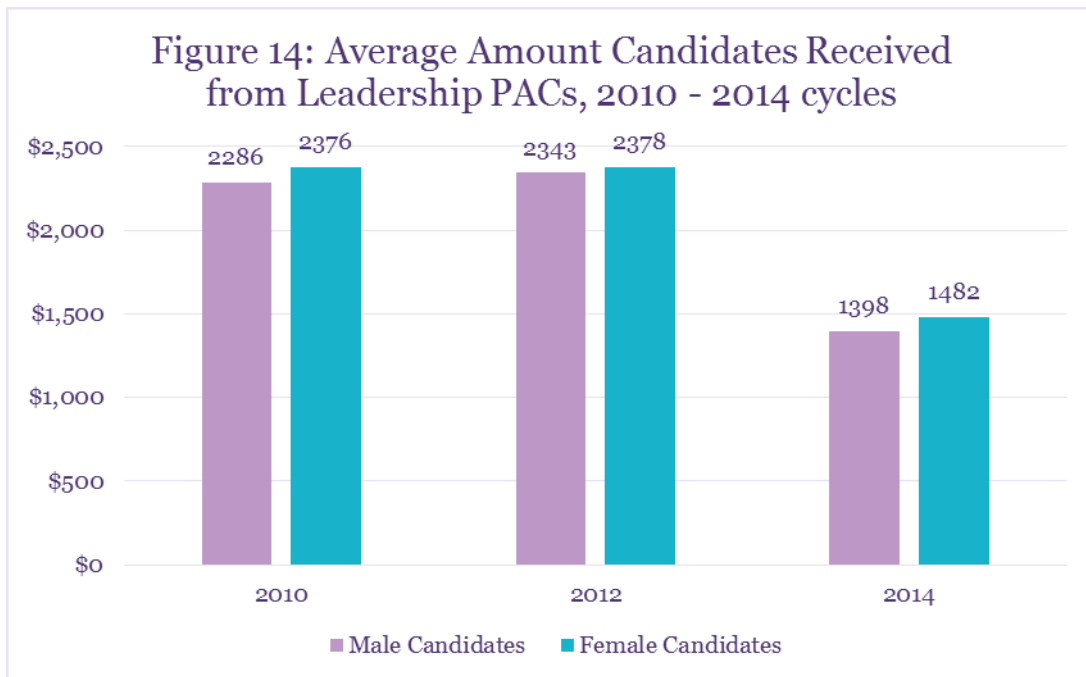
For liberal-leaning membership PACs, who currently expend much of their funds on challengers, we recommend emphasizing that focusing on challengers is not nearly as a rewarding strategy as targeting open seats.

## Leadership PACs

Just as external groups can organize to make donations to a political candidate, politicians in safe seats or with high profiles who can raise more funds than they need for re-election donate to other candidates from their respective party. By forming a **Leadership PAC**, these incumbents can pool their money to support fellow party members. Leadership PACs can only solicit \$5,000 a year from any individual and give only \$5,000 per candidate per election.

### Overall, leadership PACs fund female candidates fairly

We found that there is no significant disparity between the funding of male and female candidates by leadership PACs. As Figure 15 shows, the average amount that each candidate receives from leadership PACs is roughly equivalent, with female candidates receiving slightly more.



Source: Center for Responsive Politics

## Leadership PACs underfund women running in open seats

When we break down giving by the incumbency status of the recipient (Figure 16), we see:

- Leadership PACs, like traditional PACs, give disproportionately to incumbents; and
- Leadership PACs, like traditional PACs, most significantly underfund women running in open seats.

**Figure 16: Leadership PAC Giving to U.S. Senate and House Candidates, 2010, 2012 and 2014 cycles**

		2010	2012	2014
<b>All candidates</b>	Percent of candidates female	22%	25%	24%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	18%	21%	23%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Incumbents</b>	Percent of candidates female	18%	17%	18%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	28%	19%	32%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>-14%</b>
<b>Challengers</b>	Percent of candidates female	23%	24%	26%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	17%	20%	24%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Open Seats</b>	Percent of candidates female	24%	42%	30%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	11%	19%	17%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>13%</b>

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

## The underfunding of women running in open seats extends to both parties

Leadership PACs set up by both Democrat and Republican incumbents underfund women in open seat races (figures 17 and 18). Republican leadership PACs also underfund female challengers.

**Figure 17: Democratic Party Leadership PAC Giving to U.S. Senate and House Candidates, 2010, 2012 and 2014 cycles**

	Within the Democratic Party	2010	2012	2014
<b>All candidates</b>	Percent of candidates female	28%	33%	33%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	25%	29%	36%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>-3%</b>
<b>Incumbents</b>	Percent of candidates female	33%	24%	30%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	34%	21%	44%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>-14%</b>
<b>Challengers</b>	Percent of candidates female	24%	31%	35%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	24%	36%	44%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>-9%</b>
<b>Open Seats</b>	Percent of candidates female	31%	58%	34%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	14%	29%	25%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>9%</b>

Source: Center for Responsive Politics

**Figure 18: Republican Party Leadership PAC Giving to U.S. Senate and House Candidates, 2010, 2012 and 2014 cycles**

		<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>All candidates</b>	Percent of candidates female	17%	17%	17%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	11%	13%	15%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Incumbents</b>	Percent of candidates female	7%	10%	7%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	18%	32%	22%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-11%</b>	<b>-22%</b>	<b>-15%</b>
<b>Challengers</b>	Percent of candidates female	38%	17%	20%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	9%	9%	15%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Open Seats</b>	Percent of candidates female	21%	30%	26%
	<i>Percent of Leadership PAC funds to female candidates</i>	8%	14%	11%
	<b>Deficit</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>15%</b>

*Source: Center for Responsive Politics*

**Inform party leadership and organizations of the role**

In light of the data showing women in open seats are underfunded by leadership PACs, efforts ought to be made to alert party leadership and organization to the disparity.



# Outside Spending

Outside spending is spending by SuperPACs and other groups supporting or opposing a candidate but which is not directly coordinated by a candidate.

Outside spending is unlimited.

The *Citizens United* and *Speechnow* decisions allowed corporations and individuals to directly contribute to political entities, as long as those organizations—Super PACs—do not directly coordinate with candidates. These decisions have led to the dominance of the “megadonor,” or individual donors contributing millions of dollars to super PACs. One consequence of *Citizens United* is an increase in the amount of independent expenditures made by outside groups. These usually take the form of television and radio advertisements supporting or opposing candidates, and they cannot be run in coordination with candidates. Since 2010, the growth of these independent expenditures has been explosive, but not all candidates are targeted equally.

Among U.S. House candidates who had any independent expenditures targeting them, the majority of all money spent was negative, regardless of the candidate’s party or gender. However, while the proportion of negative independent expenditures targeting female Democrats is roughly similar to the proportion targeting male Democrats, female Republicans are targeted proportionally more by negative independent expenditures (Figure 19). This is yet more evidence of the disadvantaged position of Republican women candidates.

**Figure 19: Outside spending by whether spent supporting or opposing U.S. House candidates, 2012 and 2016**

2012	Supporting	Opposing	Percent supporting	Number of Candidates
Female Democrat	\$468,105	\$1,395,745	25%	26
Male Democrat	\$222,954	\$777,360	22%	66
Female Republican	\$339,406	\$1,508,954	18%	16
Male Republican	\$251,830	\$844,559	23%	122
<b>2014</b>				
Female Democrat	\$48,235	\$265,375	15%	26
Male Democrat	\$109,226	\$282,061	28%	57
Female Republican	\$130,219	\$1,255,468	9%	11
Male Republican	\$478,422	\$958,439	33%	100
<b>2016</b>				
Female Democrat	\$253,267	\$1,122,826	18%	23
Male Democrat	\$414,033	\$1,490,131	22%	25
Female Republican	\$166,875	\$1,283,879	12%	4
Male Republican	\$303,486	\$1,120,610	21%	51

*Source: Center for Responsive Politics*

**Recommendation: Support Republican Women Candidates**

Since Republican women candidates are the biggest target of oppositional outside spending, aspiring candidates might be deterred by the fear of an onslaught of super PAC spending. This reinforces the argument we made earlier that PACs and party leadership PACs must strengthen their support of Republican women candidates.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

The much-anticipated election of the first woman president did not happen.

The number of women governors declined from six to five - and three of those five will be out of office in 2018 due to term limits - the remaining two women facing competitive bids for re-election. Women gained only one seat in the U.S. Senate despite several strong women challengers.

Women will hold one fewer seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Disturbingly, we may be reaching the kind of equilibrium in the House that we now see in state legislative races. In 1993, women held more than 20% of state legislative seats. In the years since, they never have reached 25%. Without systematic intervention and structural change, women may be reaching a similar "glass ceiling" in Congress that will make it very hard to advance beyond 25%.

While women of color made gains in Congress they remain under-represented at all levels of government. Republican women face steep challenges in primary elections and with funding and support from PACs and donors - they will remain seriously underrepresented unless we tackle the systems that disadvantage them.

Female incumbents receive fairly equal funding from PACs and individual donors which undercuts the widely held perception that female incumbents are getting fewer dollars. While individual donors give equally to all congressional candidates - including in races for open seats - PACs underfund female candidates from both major parties in open seat races. This disparity is problematic because female candidates have the best chance of winning in open seat races. And finally, a disproportionate amount of outside spending goes to opposing Republican women.

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**In order to level the playing field for female candidates** - especially Republican women and female candidates for open seat races - PACs and donors must be challenged to take actions that ensure that female candidates from both parties are funded equally.

**These actions include but are not limited to:**

- PACs, membership PACs, and leadership PACs should fund women in open seats races at the same rate they fund male candidates
- PACs should set targets for the number of women candidates - especially Republican women candidates - increasing that target in each election cycle until parity is reached
- PACs, like political parties, should consult with organizations that recruit and train women candidates to build the pool of candidates and design enforcement mechanisms
- Donors should set targets for the number of women candidates they support - high impact donors should work in concert to publicize their commitment to women candidates
- The public should hold PACs & donors accountable for meeting their targets through withholding gifts to PACs that don't meet their target and by rewarding those that do
- The pool of women donors to campaigns should be expanded
- Action by PACs and donors to fund male and female candidates equally will both enable more women to run viable campaigns but also elevate the discussion of the need for parity funding of female candidates and the structural reforms necessary to win gender parity in our lifetimes

We would like to thank the Democracy Fund for providing the funding for this collaborative project that can help to ground future conversations about where reform is needed and how we can have an impact on electoral outcomes.

## Endnotes

1 She Should Run (2011) [\*Vote with Your Purse\*](#).

2 Although there were around 100 female incumbents in Congress during this period, only 1/3 of Senate seats were up for re-election each cycle, hence the number of female incumbents facing re-election is significantly less than 100.

3 Open Secrets (2016) [\*Donor Demographics\*](#).

4 Large donors contribute more than \$200 to candidates in a cycle. Small donors contribute less than \$200 to candidates in a cycle.

5 Open Secrets (2016) [\*Cost of Election\*](#).

6 To compare membership PACs with non-membership PACs, we selected a random sample of 503 non-membership PACs. This sample included corporate, labor union, and trade association PACs, as well as candidate committees, which tend to donate very little to other candidates. To calculate the amount given by each PAC, we took only direct contributions to candidate campaigns, as opposed to independent expenditures made to support and oppose candidates. For Senate candidates, we included donations made in the 6 year period preceding their election, and for House candidates we only included donations in the 2 years prior to their election.

7 Membership PACs, those PACs formed by a trade association, a cooperative, a corporation without capital stock or a local, national or international labor organization, are a subset of traditional PACs. Such organizations must have (and actively solicit) members, be ruled by bylaws, and be formed for a purpose other than supporting political candidates (Federal Election Commission, Corporations and Labor Organizations (January 2007), p. 21).

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