

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Understanding the Policy Priorities of Republican Women in the US House of Representatives

Michele L. Swers¹  and Danielle M. Thomsen² 

¹Department of Government, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA and

²Department of Political Science, University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

Corresponding author: Michele L. Swers; Email: mls47@georgetown.edu

(Received 19 December 2023; revised 14 June 2024; accepted 01 December 2024)

Abstract

We take a deep dive into the sponsorship and cosponsorship activity of Republicans in the US House of Representatives from 1993–2014 to examine how ideology and gender influence the policy priorities of Republican legislators on issues associated with women, as well as on the party-owned issue of tax policy. We expect that Republican women are cross-pressured since assumptions about their policy expertise as women conflict with the policy reputation of the Republican Party. As a result, Republican women's policy choices are impacted by their ideology in a way that is different from their male counterparts. Moreover, our analysis of which members' bills move through the legislative process demonstrates that beyond their own policy preferences, women are strategic party actors. Thus, women are only more likely to see action on their women-focused and anti-abortion proposals, the two areas that define the partisan divide over women's place in society.

Keywords: Congress; women and politics; public policy; social welfare; women's rights; abortion; tax policy

The *Dobbs* decision, the #MeToo Movement, and the Affordable Care Act are just the most recent examples of high-profile conflicts over women's place in society and the contours of the social safety net. Indeed, social welfare and women's rights issues have long constituted a central fault line between the parties. Contestation over the size of the welfare state and women's place in society increasingly fuels polarization in Congress. However, not all lawmakers choose to engage with these issues. Research on issue ownership indicates that voters

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Women, Gender, and Politics Research Section of the American Political Science Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

trust particular parties to handle specific issues and the parties engage more actively in legislating on issues they own (Egan 2013; Petrocik 1996). In the arena of social welfare and women's rights policies, voters favor Democrats (Pope and Woon 2009; Winter 2010). Among Democratic legislators, women are the most aggressive advocates for these issues, centering them in their policy agendas, exercising leadership within the party to move legislation forward, and aggressively attacking Republican policies as harming women (Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018; Swers 2002, 2013).

By contrast, Republicans are less active on these issues than Democrats. When legislating, they prefer to shrink the size of government and social safety net programs (Continetti 2022; Mettler 2011; Noel 2013). Focusing on traditional family values, opposition to abortion is the party's most prominent women's rights concern (Freeman 1986; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Wolbrecht 2000). Despite the highly gendered nature of these debates, we know comparatively little about the policy views of Republican women on these issues and the role they play in their party's efforts to address social welfare and women's rights policymaking.

Unlike Democratic women, Republican women are cross-pressured. Their gendered life experiences suggest they will bring a different perspective to policy issues and perhaps take more interest in social welfare and women's rights policies (Mansbridge 1999; Reingold and Swers 2011). However, as Republicans, party issue ownership theory indicates they should be less engaged with these Democratic owned issues (Petrocik 1996). Moreover, partisan polarization over women's rights should lead Republican women to further deemphasize these issues, embracing only policies that align with conservative constituencies such as anti-abortion legislation (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Wolbrecht 2000). Yet, their status as conservatives and women makes Republican women strategic party actors who can push back on Democratic efforts to portray the party as anti-women, suggesting they might have a greater incentive to engage these issues than Republican men (Atkinson, Mousavi, and Windett 2023; Roberti 2021; Swers 2018, 2023; Wineinger 2022; Wineinger and Nugent 2020).

We conduct the most comprehensive study of the legislative activity of Republicans from the 103rd–113th Congresses (1993–2014) to evaluate the ways gender does and does not shape their policy priorities and the level of influence women wield inside the party. Examining five different policy areas — tax policy, a subset of tax policies concerning social welfare issues, social welfare policies outside the tax code, women-focused issues, and abortion — we find that Republican women do have distinct policy agendas from their male colleagues. Moreover, their policy agendas are impacted by ideology in a way that is different from their male co-partisans.

Moderate and mainstream conservative women are more likely to pursue women-focused and social welfare policies than their male colleagues. However, women's engagement through bill sponsorship and cosponsorship diminishes as they get more conservative. Meanwhile women's activism on abortion increases as they become more conservative. By contrast, ideology has very little influence on Republican men's decisions to pursue social welfare, women-focused, or abortion policy initiatives. Examining how far members' proposals advance in the legislative process, we find that women are playing a strategic role in their

party's effort to combat Democratic narratives that Republican policies harm women. Republican women are only more likely to see action on their women-focused and abortion legislation, the two arenas that define the partisan divide over women's role in society.

Why Study Republican Women?

Republican women occupy a unique place in contestation over public policy related to women. Research suggests that gendered socialization and women's life experiences lead them to bring a distinct perspective to policymaking in which they are more cognizant of the impact of policy on women (Dovi 2002; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995). As a result, women will utilize their recognized moral authority to advocate for policies that benefit women, children, and families (Barnes 2016; Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018; Kittilson 2008; Osborn 2012; Reingold, Haynie, and Widner 2020; Swers 2002, 2013; Weeks 2022). Similarly, prior work on voter stereotypes demonstrates that voters perceive women as more compassionate and they favor women to address social welfare policies like health care and education, as well as women's rights issues like paid family leave and sexual harassment (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Winter 2010).

While research on gender supports the expectation that Republican and Democratic women will champion public policy related to social welfare and women's rights, party issue ownership research indicates that voters trust Democrats to legislate on these same issues that are perceived as women's expertise (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016; Petrocik 1996; Pope and Woon 2009; Winter 2010). Thus, in contrast to Democratic women, Republican women are cross-pressured since the gender-based and party-based expectations regarding their expertise conflict.

Party polarization exacerbates the challenges Republican women face in deciding how broadly to engage with social welfare and women's rights issues. Contestation over the size of the welfare state is central to the partisan divide (Mettler 2011). While Democrats seek to expand the social safety net, since Ronald Reagan, Republicans aggressively champion cutting taxes and reducing spending on social welfare programs (Continetti 2022; Noel 2013). The scope of women's rights and the protection of traditional family values have become central fault lines of party competition as women's organizations firmly aligned with the Democratic Party and social conservatives became a pivotal Republican constituency (Bawn et al. 2012; Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Wolbrecht 2000).

As a result, when Democratic women advocate for social welfare and women's rights policies, their efforts are rewarded by their voter and donor base (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Thomsen and Swers 2017). By contrast, Republican women face a more complicated decision calculus. Their advocacy of social welfare issues must align with the party's preference for limited government and shrinking the welfare state (Deckman 2016; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Wolbrecht 2000). Similarly, promoting bills related to women's rights can run afoul of social conservatives, if the proposals are perceived as undermining traditional

family values. Reflecting these conflicting incentives, in interviews, Republican women often express discomfort with the concept of women's issues but are more likely to embrace the idea that women bring a distinctive perspective to policy deliberations, one often grounded in motherhood (Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018; Dodson 2006; Swers 2002, 2005, 2013; Wineinger 2022). Thus, the set of issues Republican women advocate may be more circumscribed and impacted by their ideology as their gendered life experiences interact with their policy views to shape their priorities.

Existing research on bill sponsorship suggests there are some differences in the policy priorities of Republican men and women, with Republican women more engaged with women's issues than their male co-partisans (Dodson 2006; Swers 2002, 2005, 2013). Looking at specific issues through 2009, Atkinson (2020) and Atkinson and Windett (2019) identify the broad categories of health care, law, crime, and family issues as areas where Republican women are most active. Focusing on state legislatures in 1999–2000, Osborn (2012) found Republican women's proposals on women's health issues outside of abortion were more similar to Democratic women's bills, while their initiatives regarding domestic violence and sex offenders were more aligned with proposals by Republican men. In a comprehensive study of abortion bills in the states, Reingold et al. (2021) found conservative Republican women are more likely to introduce restrictions that are framed as protecting women, rather than bills that are focused on the life of the fetus.

The issue-focused research largely concentrates on social welfare and women's rights issues that are more associated with the Democratic Party. Work on messaging through floor speeches indicates that Republican women speak in a distinctive voice that brings women's perspectives to debates on issues outside of social welfare and women's rights ranging from the importance of small businesses to national security (Atkinson, Mousavi, and Windett 2023; Pearson and Dancy 2011; Shogan 2002). However, studies of sponsorship and cosponsorship generally do not address whether Republican women bring a gendered perspective to party-owned issues by, for example, utilizing the tax code to pursue social welfare policies.¹

We also do not know whether their gendered perspective makes Republican women more willing to reach across the aisle and sponsor bipartisan bills on social welfare and women-focused issues. Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer (2018) find that women's issues are among the most gridlocked in Congress, suggesting a need for bipartisan outreach. Yet, despite research indicating women employ a more consensus-oriented leadership style (Rosenthal 1998), Lawless, Theriault, and Guthrie (2018) find no evidence women are more bipartisan than men in their analysis of CODELS, procedural votes, and cosponsorship activity. Similarly, in interviews, Republican and Democratic women serving in the 114th Congress (2015–16) maintain that polarization prevents bipartisan cooperation among women (Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018).

Since the 1994 Republican Revolution, the Republican party has steadily ushered in more conservative women, making it imperative to understand how ideology interacts with gender to influence the policy activities of Republican women. However, all of the research on Republican women's policy

priorities examines snapshots in time or a limited set of issues in the period before the 2010 election and the rise of the Tea Party. By analyzing sponsorship and cosponsorship activity through 2014, we are able to broaden our understanding of the effect of ideological conservatism among Republicans, and women in particular, on their legislative activity and policy focus.

Finally, we need to understand how Republican women's ideological leanings and the party's need for women to counter Democratic accusations that Republican policies harm women impacts their ability to move their proposals through the legislative process. Current work on legislative effectiveness and productivity does not specifically delve into partisan differences. Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer (2013) show women are only more effective in moving bills when they are in the minority party and attribute this success to their more consensus-oriented leadership style. They do not delve into whether party contestation over issues leads party leaders to elevate women's proposals on particular policies when their identity as women can advance party goals or inoculate the party against criticism. Similarly, other work on productivity looks at the breadth of women's policy agendas, finding that women sponsor more bills on a range of topics and deliver more money to their districts because they must combat gender stereotypes about their policy expertise and electoral viability (Anzia and Berry 2011; Atkinson and Windett 2019; Kalaf-Hughes, MacDonald, and Santoro 2022; Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2018). This research does not address party differences or the possibility that women's success is influenced by their ability to help the party in addition to their own policy interests and electoral concerns.

We take a deep dive into the sponsorship and cosponsorship records of Republicans across two decades (1993–2014) to evaluate how gender and ideology impact members' willingness to bring a gendered perspective to a variety of policy issues. We consider the central Republican issue of tax policy, as well as their propensity to advocate social welfare and women-focused policy proposals, including pro-life initiatives. We also analyze whether moderate and conservative women are more inclined to reach across the aisle and sponsor legislation that attracts Democratic cosponsors. Finally, we examine whether Republican women are more likely to see their proposals on specific issues advance in the legislative process. We investigate how their ideology and their potential symbolic role as women countering Democratic attacks on the party influences their success on issues that underlie the partisan divide on women's place in society.

Theory and Hypotheses

Republican women confront a complicated landscape when choosing whether to pursue social welfare and women-focused legislation. Research on gendered socialization suggests that their life experiences as women at home and in the workplace will encourage Republican women to act on behalf of women's interests and lead them to bring a different perspective to issues (Gilligan 1982; Phillips 1995). Any personal motivation to engage social welfare or women-focused policies will be reinforced by voter expectations that women have more

expertise and moral authority to address these issues (Bauer 2020; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Moreover, the media adds to perceptions of women's moral authority by seeking out women legislators and scrutinizing their positions when these issues are debated (Swers 2013; Wineinger 2022). Perceptions of expertise and an ability to gain media attention facilitate efforts to advance legislation with colleagues, further encouraging Republican women to engage these issues.

Yet, social welfare issues like health care and education, and policies that are more narrowly focused on benefits for women and children, such as efforts to combat domestic violence and sexual harassment, or policies to address child-care and family leave, are more associated with the Democratic Party. Egan (2013) finds that when parties hold the majority, they are more likely to pursue issues that voters perceive them to own. As a result, Republican women face cross-pressures when deciding whether to engage these issues. Since voters prefer Democrats to handle social welfare and women's rights policies, Democrats have a greater incentive to draft legislation on these issues (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016; Petrocik 1996; Pope and Woon 2009; Winter 2010). Meanwhile, Republican women risk spending political capital on issues that are less valued by colleagues and Republican voters. Furthermore, pursuit of these policies can run afoul of important party constituencies. While many Republican proposals seek to reduce federal spending on social welfare programs, efforts to expand the social safety net, whether through tax credits or new programs, contradict the party's preference for limited government and can alienate business interests that oppose mandates (Continetti 2022; Deckman 2016; Noel 2013).

Moreover, social conservatives oppose women's rights initiatives that they perceive as undermining traditional family values, especially policies related to reproductive rights that expand access to family planning services and abortion (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Schreiber 2008; Wolbrecht 2000). At the same time, the growing importance of social conservatives within the party elevates the value of appeals to motherhood, Christian principles, and the traditional family (Deckman 2016; Schreiber 2008). Championing social welfare and women-focused policies can also be a path to influence if their advocacy attracts swing voter groups like suburban women. Further complicating this decision calculus, Republican Party culture rejects the idea of identity politics and group rights. Republican voters and donors are not responsive to calls to elect more women and prefer to focus on general values of conservatism and individualism (Grossmann and Hopkins 2016; Thomsen and Swers 2017).

Epitomizing this discomfort with highlighting gender, Swers and Larson (2005) found Republican women varied in their willingness to champion women's issues. Some moderate women felt a responsibility to represent women's interests, whereas other women denied the existence of women's interests or did not incorporate them into their own agendas. Socially conservative women were strongly pro-life and pursued women's issues from their perspective as wives and mothers. Wineinger (2022) also found that ideology impacts how women address issues on the House floor, with moderate and conservative women developing distinct gendered partisan identities. In sum,

Republican women face a host of conflicting expectations based on their life experiences, voter stereotypes, party priorities, and their ideological beliefs that their male counterparts do not. As a result, ideology could impact women's desire to pursue these policies in a way it does not for men.

Hypothesis 1: Republican women are more likely to advocate for social welfare and women-focused policies than their male counterparts, but gender differences diminish as women become more conservative; meanwhile ideology will not be an important factor in predicting men's engagement.

Because social welfare policy and women-focused legislation overlap with Democratic interests, Republican legislative entrepreneurs may be incentivized to seek out bipartisan support (Harbridge 2015). Comparative work shows that women are more likely to collaborate across party lines on policy development (Barnes 2016). Research on women's legislative agendas suggests that women's greater effectiveness when they are in the minority party stems from their propensity to build consensus (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013, 2018). Republican women may be particularly incentivized to take bipartisan action on these issues because there is a clear gender gap among Republicans on social welfare policy. Compared to Republican men, Republican women are more supportive of spending on childcare, education, and welfare programs. However, they remain less supportive of these programs than Democrats (Barnes, Beall, and Cassese 2021; Barnes and Cassese 2017).

Hypothesis 2: Republican women offer more bipartisan legislation on social welfare and women-focused policies than men, with moderate women the most likely to offer bipartisan bills.

Drawing on their unique life experiences as women, Republican women may bring a gendered perspective to policymaking on party-owned issues, particularly tax policy. Tax policy is one of the issues most strongly associated with the Republican Party. Presidents Reagan, G. W. Bush, and Trump all prioritized passing major tax cuts. One of the major impetuses of the Tea Party movement was opposition to the Affordable Care Act, based on the idea that Americans are "Taxed Enough Already" (TEA) (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Republican reluctance to raise taxes has reshaped how social welfare policy is made, as new programs are often pursued through the tax code (Mettler 2011). While tax policy has long been central to the Republican partisan identity, research on voter stereotypes suggests voters perceive tax policy as a masculine issue (Bauer 2020).

However, Republican women may bring a gendered lens to tax policymaking and pursue social welfare policymaking through the tax code. Indeed, recent research demonstrates that democratic countries with more women in their legislatures have lower "pink taxes," or smaller disparities in the import tax rates for similar goods marketed to men and women (Betz, Fortunato, and O'Brien 2021). In an analysis of floor speeches in the 105th Congress (1996–97), Shogan (2002) finds Republican women are more likely to talk about the impact of taxes and the economy on working women. Similarly, Pearson and Dancey

(2011) show that Republican women are more likely to invoke gendered rhetoric on a range of issues.

Hypothesis 3: Republican women are less engaged than men on general tax policy but more likely to use the tax system to influence social welfare policy.

Meanwhile, party imperatives mix with legislators' policy preferences to influence which members' bills see action. Women are strategic party actors. Gender differences will be reinforced by Republican women's ability to help their party on these issues (Atkinson, Mousavi, and Windett 2023; Reingold et al. 2021; Roberti 2021; Swers 2018, 2023; Wineinger 2022; Wineinger and Nugent 2020). While voters perceive the parties as owning specific issues, parties must be responsive to the political context and the issue priorities of voters. Partisans will utilize issue framing to "trespass" on the other party's issues by emphasizing aspects of an issue that align with voter perceptions of the party. For example, while Democrats might talk about expanding health benefits, Republicans gain traction with arguments about controlling health care costs (Sides 2006; Atkinson, Mousavi, and Windett 2023). The party's need for a female spokesperson to help attract swing voter groups such as suburban voters further incentivizes the party to advance women's proposals (Swers 2018; Wineinger 2022; Wineinger and Nugent 2020).

The party's imperative to elevate women will be most urgent on women-focused and abortion initiatives. Democrats frequently portray Republicans as anti-women in campaign messaging, and Republican leaders are eager to spotlight women members to counter this narrative (Swers 2013, 2018; Wineinger 2022). Similarly, the issue of abortion is a particular focus of Republicans because of its importance to social conservatives. To deflect Democratic criticism and to demonstrate that pro-life policies are supported by women, conservative women will be called on to advocate for these bills (Reingold et al. 2021; Roberti 2021; Rolfes-Haase and Swers 2022; Swers 2023). Republican women should have greater success on proposals that anchor the partisan divide on women's rights. The party's need to have a female spokesperson to combat Democratic criticism of the party as hostile to women will be most evident on these issues.

Hypothesis 4: Republican women are more likely than Republican men to see their bills on women-focused and anti-abortion issues advance in the legislative process.

Measuring Republican Policy Priorities

We analyze how gender and ideology impact the legislative priorities of Republican men and women by examining the sponsorship and cosponsorship activity of members from the 103rd–113th Congresses (1993–2014). Utilizing data from the Congressional Bills Project (Adler and Wilkerson 2022), we identify five categories of bills: tax bills, social welfare tax bills, social welfare policies outside of the tax code, women-focused policies, and anti-abortion policies. Social

welfare policies outside of the tax code include issues concerning health care, education, welfare reform, and children's issues such as adoption, foster care, and child support. Congress developed multiple important social welfare initiatives in this period. The Clinton years saw a failed effort at national health insurance reform, the creation of the SCHIP Program to provide health insurance for low-income children, and major welfare reform. During the Bush presidency, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, a significant education reform bill, and created a prescription drug benefit in Medicare. The Obama presidency featured a renewed effort at education reform and Obama's signature expansion of health insurance, the Affordable Care Act (Adler and Wilkerson 2013; Jacobs and Skocpol 2015).

Women-focused policies incorporate issues that directly impact women and are often flashpoints in the party culture wars, including violence against women, women's health, childcare, family leave, and employment discrimination.² Anti-abortion policies concern restrictions on abortion and family planning services. The Clinton administration saw the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act and the Violence Against Women Act, which Congress reauthorized during the Bush and Obama administrations. Under Obama, Congress passed the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act (Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018; Dodson 2006; Swers 2002, 2013). During the Bush presidency, Congress passed a ban on late term abortions and legislation to increase criminal punishments if a fetus is harmed during the commission of a federal crime. Stem cell research was also a flashpoint in the Clinton and Bush years, and Republicans have utilized the Appropriations process to restrict the use of federal funds for abortion (Rolfes-Haase and Swers 2022; Swers 2023).

To address whether Republican women bring a gendered perspective to party-owned issues, we compare men's and women's activism on general tax policy and a set of tax issues focused on social welfare benefits. Across issues, tax policy is among the most strongly associated with the Republican Party (Petrocik 1996; Pope and Woon 2009). Major tax cuts were implemented during the George W. Bush administration and reauthorized in the Obama years (Crandall-Hollick 2021). The general tax category includes a broad range of issues like the reduction of the capital gains tax, elimination of the estate tax, and various business tax incentives. Social welfare tax issues include proposals such as expanding the child tax credit, increasing deductions for health and education expenses, and creating an IRA for homemakers.

It is important to examine whether Republican women pursue social welfare goals through the tax code in light of recent work demonstrating that policymakers have increasingly shunned the direct disbursement of benefits and favored less visible subsidies (Mettler 2011). For example, Republicans proposed numerous health care tax deductions in response to Clinton's effort to create national health insurance and Obama's Affordable Care Act (Jacobs and Skocpol 2015). The child tax credit, first created during the Clinton administration, was expanded as part of the Bush tax cuts and during the Obama administration. The child tax credit was also a key provision in the Trump tax cuts, and most recently as part of Biden's pandemic stimulus (Crandall-Hollick 2021).

The Congressional Bills Project contains information on all bills sponsored by members in each Congress, including the bill title, which provides a summary of the bill's content. The bills also receive a major and a minor issue code such as major code "Macroeconomics" and minor code "Taxation, Tax Policy, and Tax Reform." To identify bills in each issue category, we read each bill's title and major and minor code, and then categorized the legislation by its subject and incorporated it into the relevant issue set. When more information was needed, we read the bill summary of the legislation on Congress.gov. This method allows us to conduct more fine-grained analyses of members' issue agendas and provides an opportunity to assess unexplored questions, like which Republicans are utilizing the tax code to pursue a social welfare agenda.

To date, work that utilizes the Congressional Bills Project to analyze gender differences in legislators' agendas uses only the major codes (Atkinson and Windett 2019; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2018). Some of the categories like "Health" and "Education" are clearly focused on issues associated with women, but many of the categories are quite broad, such as "Labor, Employment, and Immigration" or "Law, Crime, and Family Issues." Atkinson (2020) conducted the only analysis of the more than 200 minor codes, but even these codes are not sufficiently targeted. For example, abortion is incorporated into a minor code for "Right to Privacy and Access to Government Information" that also includes police wiretapping, privacy of consumer and worker records, and drug and polygraph testing. Moreover, she analyzes gender but not gender-party differences across minor codes. Finally, social welfare tax policy cannot be studied using the major and minor codes because these proposals are included in multiple major and minor issue categories.³

To assess whether Republican women are more likely to engage in bipartisan legislating, we coded whether 20% of the cosponsors on a member's bill are Democrats.⁴ Harbridge (2015) utilizes the 20% threshold in her comprehensive study of bipartisanship. She finds that while voting is strongly partisan, there remains a high level of bipartisanship in members' sponsorship activity. Our final interest is whether Republican women are more or less likely to see action on their proposals. The Congressional Bills Project also includes information on which bills passed the committee, the House, the Senate, were vetoed, and became law. We added information on which bills received a hearing or passed a subcommittee and whether a bill was defeated on the House floor.

In addition to gender, ideology is a central focus of our analysis. We utilize first dimension NOMINATE scores to measure member ideology, with higher values corresponding to ideological conservatism (Lewis et al. 2022). We interact gender and ideology to evaluate whether the relationship between ideology and legislative behavior differs for men and women. Specifically, we are testing whether women are cross-pressured and their willingness to advocate for social welfare and women's rights issues diminishes as they become more conservative. However, ideology should not have a similar impact on the decision calculus of men.

Members' policy agendas are also influenced by the needs and preferences of their constituency, and we account for the Democratic presidential vote share in the district. We incorporate measures of the district's racial and ethnic

composition, proportion of college educated voters, median household income, unemployment rate, percent urban, and whether the district is in the South.⁵ Because prior work demonstrates that women legislators are more likely to be elected from more educated, racially diverse, and higher income districts (Palmer and Simon 2008), the inclusion of these variables also ensures that differences attributed to gender do not actually stem from the fact that women represent different kinds of districts.

Finally, a member's position within the institution strongly influences their ability to influence the agenda (Hall 1996; Volden and Wiseman 2014). We include measures for seniority and whether the representative is in the majority or holds a leadership position.⁶ We account for whether the member has a seat on a relevant committee, such as Ways and Means for tax issues, or serves as the chair or ranking member of that committee.⁷ We also include the total number of bills members sponsor and cosponsor because more active members will be more likely to sponsor bills in particular areas and because women are more prolific legislators (Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2018; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013).

Results

We present the results from a series of Poisson regression models to test our expectations about gender differences in Republican members' policy priorities and influence.⁸ For each type of legislative activity — sponsorship, sponsorship of bipartisan bills, cosponsorship, and sponsorship of bills that received action — we test whether gender and ideology influences members' propensity to engage each of our five sets of issues.⁹ We begin by examining gender differences in bill sponsorship to test our hypothesis that the cross-pressures Republican women face impact their policy agendas in ways that are different from men. Indeed, the models in Table 1 demonstrate that with the exception of general tax policy, gender matters for whether lawmakers are active on social welfare issues within and outside the tax code, women-focused policies, and anti-abortion initiatives. Furthermore, women's ideological views influence their decisions about what bills to sponsor differently from their male counterparts. The results suggest that voter expectations, socialization, and ideology are impacting the decision calculus of Republican women concerning which issues to focus on in a way they are not for Republican men.

The graphs in Figure 1 illustrate the magnitude of these relationships by plotting predicted values by gender and ideology. For Republican men, ideology has a more muted impact on their decision to sponsor bills on social welfare, women-focused, and anti-abortion policies. The main exception is social welfare tax policy. When conservative men engage social welfare policy, they do it through the tax code. By contrast, women's interest in these areas is strongly influenced by their ideology. Moderate women are the most active proponents of using the tax code to enhance social welfare benefits, but gender differences diminish as women become more conservative.¹⁰ At the highest levels of conservatism, women are actually less likely than their male counterparts to pursue social welfare legislation through the tax code. Women who resemble Virginia

Table 1. Bill sponsorship, by policy area

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax policy	Tax social welfare	Social welfare	Women-focused	Anti-abortion
Woman	−0.33 (0.21)	1.75** (0.25)	1.04** (0.13)	1.32** (0.21)	1.42* (0.58)
DW-NOMINATE score	0.63** (0.16)	1.49** (0.29)	−0.40* (0.18)	−1.28** (0.37)	3.54** (0.52)
Woman x DW-NOMINATE score	−0.12 (0.54)	−3.27** (0.67)	−1.92** (0.38)	−1.26* (0.59)	−0.57 (1.32)
Ways and Means	1.53** (0.06)	0.85** (0.10)	0.31** (0.07)	0.07 (0.15)	−1.66** (0.63)
Budget	0.00 (0.09)				
Education		0.25* (0.12)	0.59** (0.06)	0.08 (0.15)	−0.33 (0.27)
Energy and Commerce		−0.03 (0.13)	0.71** (0.06)	0.26* (0.12)	0.20 (0.23)
Veterans Affairs			0.36** (0.08)		
Judiciary				0.36* (0.16)	0.39† (0.23)
Relevant committee chair	0.39* (0.17)	0.76** (0.26)	0.23 (0.15)	0.76** (0.27)	−1.35 (1.19)
Total bills	0.04** (0.00)	0.05** (0.00)	0.03** (0.00)	0.05** (0.00)	0.03** (0.00)
Majority	−0.09† (0.06)	−0.26** (0.09)	0.18** (0.06)	−0.19† (0.11)	−0.01 (0.18)
Seniority	0.00 (0.01)	−0.03* (0.01)	0.01† (0.01)	−0.01 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)
Party leader	0.31* (0.14)	0.44** (0.17)	0.09 (0.17)	0.95** (0.17)	−2.00* (1.01)
Dem presidential vote	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01** (0.00)	0.04** (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)

(Continued)

Table 1. *Continued*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax policy	Tax social welfare	Social welfare	Women-focused	Anti-abortion
Constant	−0.57*	−2.59**	−0.94**	−3.27**	−5.55**
	(0.25)	(0.43)	(0.24)	(0.47)	(0.76)
Number of observations	2,402	2,402	2,402	2,402	2,402
Log likelihood	−3,145.25	−1,743.77	−3,978.08	−1,576.56	−631.89

Notes: Results are from zero-inflated Poisson regressions (103rd–113th Congresses). Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The models also include the district’s racial and ethnic composition, proportion of college educated voters, median household income, unemployment rate, percent urban, and South.

†p < 0.10,
*p < 0.05,
**p < 0.01.

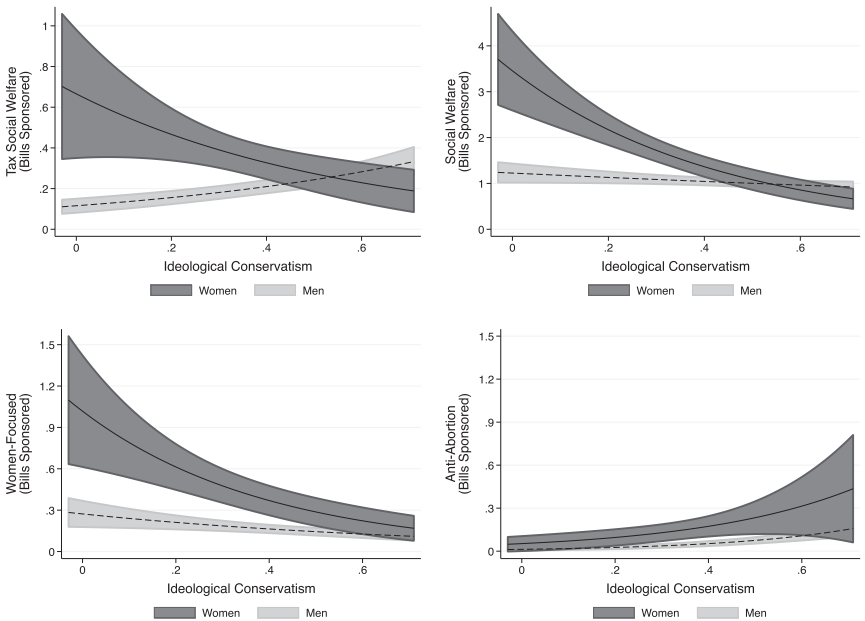


Figure 1. Bill sponsorship, by policy area.

Foxx (R-NC; NOMINATE score of 0.67 in the 113th Congress), for example, sponsor 0.2 bills, compared to 0.3 bills for ideologically similar Republican men. Meanwhile, moderate women like Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL; NOMINATE score of 0.25 in the 113th Congress) are predicted to sponsor 0.4 bills, and women

like Kay Granger (R-TX; NOMINATE score of 0.43 in the 113th Congress) who are in the party mainstream sponsor 0.3 bills.¹¹

When we examine women's activism on social welfare, women-focused, and anti-abortion bills, we continue to see Republican women structure their policy agendas differently across the ideological spectrum. On social welfare bills such as increasing funding for health research, reforming medical malpractice laws, creating school choice programs, and reforming welfare, moderate and mainstream conservative women are more active proponents of these policies, but the impact of gender declines as women become more conservative. The propensity of men and women to offer these bills converges at the highest levels of conservatism. Turning to women-focused bills, we see that while gender differences are smaller at higher levels of conservatism, these differences remain apparent at all levels of conservatism. Moreover, the most conservative women are predicted to sponsor as many women-focused bills as moderate and mainstream conservative men.

Abortion policy is the one area where conservatism increases women's propensity to sponsor legislation. Conservative women sponsor more anti-abortion bills than men. We can see in the bottom right panel of [Figure 1](#) that conservative Republican women like Foxx sponsor 0.4 anti-abortion bills, compared to 0.1 bills for conservative men. Reflecting the party's desire to elevate women to counter Democratic attacks that Republican abortion initiatives harm women, moderate women like Ros-Lehtinen are predicted to sponsor the same number of anti-abortion bills (0.1) as conservative men. By contrast, moderate men are predicted to sponsor only 0.03 bills. Research at the state level similarly finds that conservative women are increasingly active advocates of pro-life policies, particularly policies that are framed as protecting women (Reingold et al. 2021; Roberti 2021).

In [Table 2](#), we examine gender differences in the propensity to sponsor bipartisan bills. As one would expect, more moderate members are more likely to sponsor bipartisan bills that attract Democratic cosponsors. However, the graphs in [Figure 2](#) illustrate that this pattern is largely driven by the sponsorship behavior of women members. For general tax policy, the issue area that is owned by Republicans but is not clearly connected to women's life experiences, ideology is associated with bipartisan sponsorship patterns for men, but it does not impact which women offer general tax bills (top left panel).

On the policies in which voters assume women have more expertise and women's own life experiences might contribute to their policy decisions, women are more willing to reach across the aisle when crafting social welfare tax, social welfare, and women-focused bills. However, gender differences diminish as women become more conservative. Still gender differences are most persistent across the ideological spectrum on the women-focused bills that have the most direct consequences for women as a group. Indeed, moderate Republican women like Ros-Lehtinen are expected to sponsor 0.3 bipartisan bills, mainstream conservative women like Granger are expected to sponsor 0.2 bipartisan bills, and conservative women are predicted to sponsor 0.1 bipartisan bills, the same number of bipartisan bills as moderate men.¹² In sum, the bipartisan results indicate that gendered life experience leads Republican women to collaborate

Table 2. Bipartisan bill sponsorship, by policy area

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Tax policy	Tax social welfare	Social welfare	Women-focused
Woman	−0.54*	1.45**	0.85**	1.54**
	(0.25)	(0.31)	(0.18)	(0.28)
DW-NOMINATE score	−0.85**	−0.41	−1.50**	−2.30**
	(0.28)	(0.49)	(0.26)	(0.49)
Woman x DW-NOMINATE score	0.77	−2.11**	−1.19*	−1.36†
	(0.71)	(0.79)	(0.52)	(0.77)
Ways and Means	2.36**	1.26**	0.49**	−0.03
	(0.09)	(0.16)	(0.09)	(0.19)
Budget	−0.16			
	(0.14)			
Education		0.53**	0.51**	0.21
		(0.20)	(0.08)	(0.22)
Energy and Commerce		−0.15	0.97**	0.52**
		(0.22)	(0.07)	(0.17)
Veterans Affairs			0.48**	
			(0.10)	
Judiciary				0.44*
				(0.21)
Relevant committee chair	−0.71**	−0.06	0.11	1.09**
	(0.23)	(0.82)	(0.23)	(0.25)
Total bills	0.03**	0.05**	0.03**	0.05**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Majority	0.56**	−0.14	0.46**	0.03
	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.08)	(0.15)
Seniority	0.03**	−0.02	0.01†	−0.02
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Party leader	0.07	0.62*	0.04	0.88**
	(0.23)	(0.30)	(0.20)	(0.22)
Dem presidential vote	0.00	0.02†	0.01†	0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Tax policy	Tax social welfare	Social welfare	Women-focused
Constant	-1.80** (0.38)	-3.42** (0.70)	-1.50** (0.31)	-4.38** (0.59)
Number of observations	2,411	2,411	2,411	2,411
Log likelihood	-1,689.58	-820.11	-2,861.81	-983.62

Notes: Results are from zero-inflated Poisson regressions (103rd–113th Congresses). Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The models also include the district's racial and ethnic composition, proportion of college educated voters, median household income, unemployment rate, percent urban, and South.

† $p < 0.10$.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

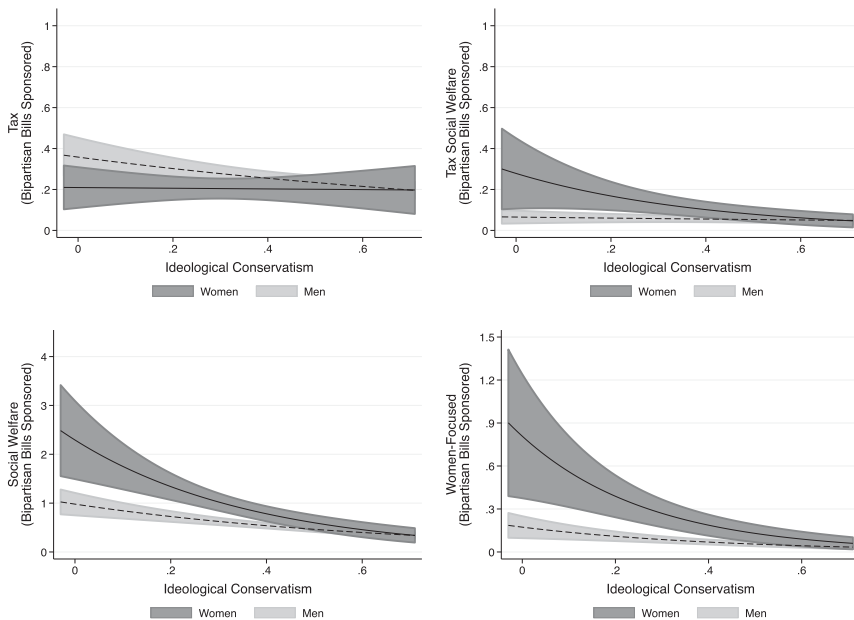


Figure 2. Bipartisan bill sponsorship, by policy area.

with Democrats on women-focused issues to a greater extent than one would expect based on their ideological leanings.

Turning to cosponsorship, research suggests that cosponsorship is an important avenue for position taking with voters and signaling to other legislators about the policy content of a proposal (Koger 2003; Wilson and Young 1997). The results in Table 3 support the idea that on the issues that have shaped the partisan divide since the New Deal, tax rates and the size of the

Table 3. Bill cosponsorship, by policy area

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax policy	Tax social welfare	Social welfare	Women-focused	Anti-abortion
Woman	−0.15† (0.09)	0.12 (0.09)	0.08 (0.07)	0.32** (0.12)	−0.82** (0.20)
DW-NOMINATE score	0.69** (0.06)	0.66** (0.08)	−0.38** (0.05)	−0.34** (0.08)	1.40** (0.12)
Woman x DW-NOMINATE score	0.32 (0.20)	−0.08 (0.21)	−0.06 (0.17)	0.12 (0.27)	1.66** (0.39)
Ways and Means	0.48** (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	−0.01 (0.03)	−0.08† (0.04)	−0.10 (0.06)
Budget	−0.00 (0.03)				
Education		0.09** (0.03)	0.20** (0.02)	0.05 (0.03)	−0.01 (0.05)
Energy and Commerce		−0.00 (0.03)	0.21** (0.02)	−0.00 (0.03)	0.05 (0.05)
Veterans Affairs			0.08** (0.03)		
Judiciary				0.10** (0.04)	0.10† (0.05)
Relevant committee chair	−0.80* (0.34)	−0.13 (0.12)	−0.08 (0.07)	0.27* (0.11)	0.03 (0.17)
Total bills	0.00** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)
Majority	0.41** (0.02)	0.35** (0.03)	0.81** (0.02)	0.22** (0.03)	0.27** (0.04)
Seniority	−0.01** (0.00)	−0.02** (0.00)	−0.02** (0.00)	−0.02** (0.00)	−0.02** (0.01)
Party leader	0.11* (0.05)	0.05 (0.06)	−0.02 (0.05)	0.19** (0.07)	0.06 (0.07)
Dem presidential vote	−0.00* (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	−0.03** (0.00)

(Continued)

Table 3. Continued

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax policy	Tax social welfare	Social welfare	Women-focused	Anti-abortion
Constant	2.23** (0.09)	0.56** (0.10)	1.47** (0.07)	0.64** (0.12)	0.13 (0.17)
Number of observations	2,398	2,398	2,398	2,398	2,398
Log likelihood	−9,154.51	−5,997.73	−8,715.60	−5,784.34	−6,370.54

Notes: Results are from Poisson regressions (103rd–113th Congresses). Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The models also include the district's racial and ethnic composition, proportion of college educated voters, median household income, unemployment rate, percent urban, and South.

†p < 0.10,
*p < 0.05,
**p < 0.01.

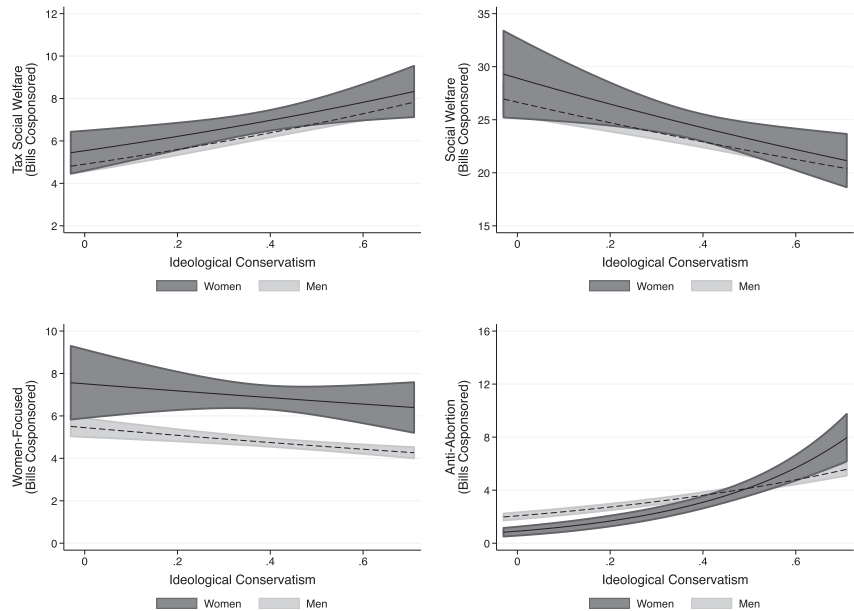


Figure 3. Bill cosponsorship, by policy area.

social welfare state, ideology, not gender, drives legislators' cosponsorship activity (Models 1–3).

The predicted values in Figure 3 demonstrate that conservatives are more inclined to cosponsor bills that influence social welfare policy through the tax code, while more moderate members cosponsor traditional social welfare

legislation. However, when deciding to cosponsor a women-focused bill, gender is an important factor. Republican women's life experiences may increase their commitment to addressing these issues, and policy entrepreneurs likely want to harness women's perceived authority to signal support to other legislators. The most conservative women are predicted to cosponsor more women-focused bills than both conservative and moderate men (bottom left panel). Furthermore, conservative women are the most committed to cosponsoring pro-life legislation. The gender patterns on abortion differ for sponsorship and cosponsorship. In the arena of bill sponsorship, party leaders want women to take the lead to demonstrate that not all women are pro-choice, but cosponsorship is less visible. Moderate women may be less interested in taking positions on these issues, while conservative women may want to signal their commitment to pro-life causes.

The importance of women as strategic party actors is further highlighted by the gender differences in which members' bills move through the legislative process. Very few policies receive action in the chamber, so the size and significance of the results are weak. As we would expect, party leaders, committee members, and chairs are more likely to see action on their proposals. Still, we can see suggestive patterns in [Table 4](#) and [Figure 4](#).

Gender is associated with legislative action on women-focused and anti-abortion policies. In these two issue areas, women's life experiences, voters' beliefs about women's expertise, and media expectations may combine to increase women's willingness to spend political capital and push bills through the legislative process; however, ideology plays a more limited role.¹³ Any personal motivation women have to legislate on these issues is likely reinforced by the party's desire to elevate women as spokespersons to counter Democratic criticisms that Republican policies harm women (Atkinson, Mousavi, and Windett 2023; Roberti 2021; Swers 2018, 2023; Wineinger 2022; Wineinger and Nugent 2020).

Anti-abortion bills illustrate this dynamic. Abortion is a top priority for social conservatives. When Republicans control the majority, party leaders always put a bill on the floor to coincide with the March for Life to demonstrate their commitment to the issue. Pro-life groups such as the National Right to Life Committee and Susan B. Anthony List pressure the party to pass more initiatives restricting abortion and they routinely score members' votes (Rolfes-Haase and Swers 2022). Having a female face to advocate for these policies is so essential that in her memoir, Marjorie Dannenfelser noted that she founded Susan B. Anthony List in the early 1990s because she believed that Republicans needed "the voices of pro-life women legislators to counter the dozens of congresswomen who spoke with authority and vigor in defense of abortion" (Dannenfelser 2020). Interviews with Republican staffers and Republican women members indicate that the party relies on women to act as spokespersons to counter Democratic efforts to portray the party as harming women's interests (Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018; Swers 2002, 2013; Wineinger and Nugent 2020). Thus, the party's desire to both shape voter perceptions of the party's commitment to women and respond to interest group demands to take action on abortion combines with women's own policy preferences to provide strategic opportunities for Republican women to both help the party and achieve

Table 4. Action on sponsored bills, by policy area

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax policy	Tax social welfare	Social welfare	Women- focused	Anti- abortion
Woman	−0.22 (0.90)	−2.10† (1.25)	0.05 (0.39)	0.76† (0.44)	1.96* (0.93)
DW-NOMINATE score	−2.24* (0.88)	0.29 (1.89)	−1.19** (0.45)	−1.42* (0.68)	1.05 (1.51)
Woman x DW-NOMINATE score	0.56 (2.43)	6.01* (2.53)	−0.32 (0.93)	1.27 (1.10)	0.21 (2.10)
Ways and Means	2.34** (0.36)	2.39** (0.33)	0.43** (0.17)	0.85** (0.26)	−0.82 (1.11)
Budget	−0.24 (0.33)				
Education		1.26* (0.62)	1.13** (0.15)	0.42 (0.33)	0.07 (0.77)
Energy and Commerce		−1.36 (1.06)	0.68** (0.14)	−1.05* (0.50)	0.07 (0.75)
Veterans Affairs			0.61** (0.16)		
Judiciary				0.95** (0.29)	1.94** (0.53)
Relevant committee chair	1.79** (0.34)	2.26** (0.60)	0.93** (0.19)	1.73** (0.37)	0.41 (1.71)
Total bills	0.02* (0.01)	0.07** (0.02)	0.02** (0.00)	0.05** (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)
Seniority	0.04† (0.02)	−0.01 (0.05)	0.08** (0.01)	0.00 (0.03)	0.15** (0.03)
Party leader	1.61** (0.46)	1.92** (0.46)	0.68* (0.28)	1.37** (0.29)	−13.21** (0.39)
Dem presidential vote	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.05 (0.03)
Constant	−1.49 (1.09)	−5.35** (1.32)	−2.35** (0.69)	−4.11** (0.94)	−7.36** (1.42)

(Continued)

Table 4. *Continued*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Tax policy	Tax social welfare	Social welfare	Women- focused	Anti- abortion
Number of observations	2,402	2,402	2,402	2,402	2,402
Log likelihood	−435.53	−184.15	−1,358.66	−502.94	−132.54

Notes: Results are from zero-inflated Poisson regressions (103rd–113th Congresses). Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The models also include the district’s racial and ethnic composition, proportion of college educated voters, median household income, unemployment rate, percent urban, and South.

† $p < 0.10$,
* $p < 0.05$,
** $p < 0.01$.

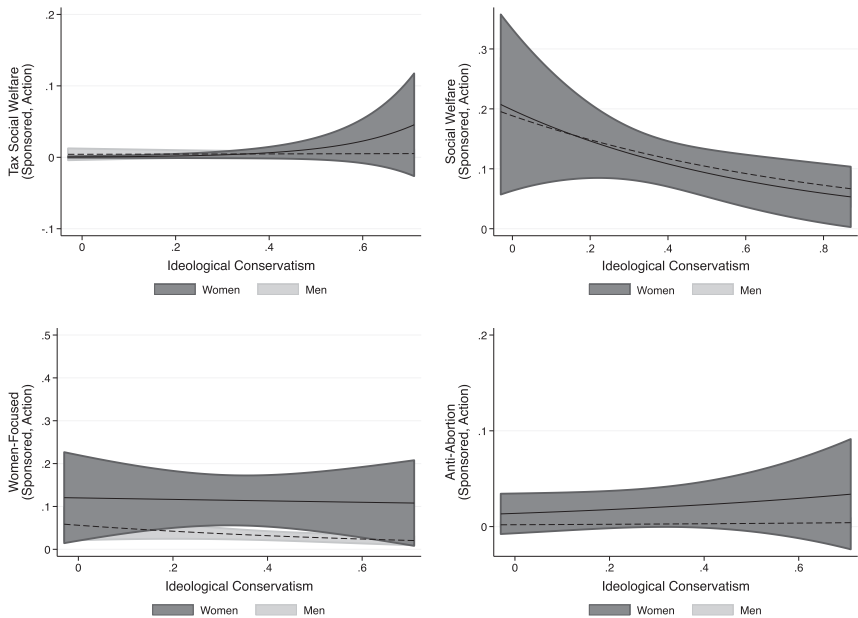


Figure 4. Action on sponsored bills, by policy area.

their own policy goals (Reingold et al. 2021; Roberti 2021; Swers 2018, 2023; Wineinger 2022)

Conclusion

Social welfare and women’s rights issues will continue to define the partisan divide. Given the centrality of these issues, women will play an important role in their party’s policymaking efforts. The nature of this role will be heavily

influenced by their ideological profile. Our research demonstrates that Republican women are cross-pressured as they navigate an environment in which their party's policy reputation conflicts with voter expectations about women's policy expertise. They must be judicious when choosing to pursue policies based on their gendered life experiences. In response to this conflict, as women get more conservative, they are less likely to sponsor legislation on social welfare and women's rights issues. Meanwhile Republican men face no conflict between gender expectations and the party's reputation. As a result, their level of conservatism generally does not predict whether they sponsor or cosponsor social welfare or women-focused policies.

By contrast, gender considerations, whether stemming from socialization, voter and media expectations, or partisan imperatives, are impacting Republican women's policy choices. Moderate and mainstream conservative Republican women sponsor more social welfare bills and women-focused bills than their male colleagues. The most conservative women offer more women-focused bills than conservative men, and they offer as many women-focused bills as moderate and mainstream Republican men. Similarly, comparative research suggests that right leaning women both reject the feminist worldview promoted by left parties and advocate for their own vision of women's interests (Celis and Childs 2018; Franceschet, Piscopo, and Thomas 2016). Our research provides additional support for these findings. Moreover, our analysis of bipartisanship demonstrates that bipartisan legislating is the purview of moderate members. Yet, mainstream conservative women, and to a lesser extent the most conservative women, are sponsoring as much bipartisan legislation on tax social welfare, social welfare, and women-focused bills as moderate men.

Furthermore, the fact that Republican women see more action on their proposals regarding women-focused and anti-abortion issues suggests that women are acting as strategic party actors (Swers 2013, 2023; Wineinger 2022; Wineinger and Nugent 2020). On the issues most closely associated with women, Republican women's interest in these policies is likely being elevated by party and committee leaders' desire to reach women voters and counter Democratic criticisms of the party by highlighting women's policy leadership.

Looking toward the future of policymaking, tax policy and abortion are the policy arenas most likely to rise to the top of the agenda in a Republican controlled Congress, particularly when there is a Republican president. Interestingly, tax social welfare policy is the one area where ideology matters for Republican men. If conservative men are going to engage social welfare policy, it will likely be through the tax code. Indeed, under the Trump administration, Republicans adopted an expansion of the child tax credit championed by Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Mike Lee (R-UT) as part of their major tax bill (Stein 2017).

Most recently, in anticipation of the need to reauthorize the Trump tax cuts, a deal was brokered between House Republicans led by Ways and Means chair Jason Smith (R-MO) and Senate Democrats led by Ron Wyden (D-OR) that included an expansion of the child tax credit. Despite high levels of gridlock and polarization, the Republican controlled House passed this bill (Reilly 2024). The child tax credit remains a central point of contention as President Trump

and congressional Republicans work to renew the 2017 tax legislation and pass new tax cuts. While tax policy is tightly controlled by party leaders and the tax writing committees, Republican women could focus the party's attention on women's interests. During the crafting of the 2017 Trump tax cuts, Senator Deb Fischer (R-NE) secured a tax credit for businesses that offer paid leave (Sherlock 2023).

Finally, when Republicans control Congress, they regularly advance policies to limit abortion. The *Dobbs* decision has complicated these efforts due to significant public backlash to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* (Swers 2023). In this atmosphere, the importance of women to efforts to restrict abortion will be even more significant. Republican women can influence the nature and scope of proposals as the party will be especially reliant on their efforts to speak as women in support of proposed restrictions. Reingold et al. (2021) and Roberti (2021) find that women are more likely to lead on abortion when the issue is framed as protecting women. With heightened media and public attention on abortion, Republicans will be even more reliant on women to advocate for funding restrictions in the Appropriations process and other bills limiting access to reproductive health services.

Acknowledgments. We are grateful to Tiffany Barnes, Tracy Osborn, participants at the 2022 Women in Legislative Studies conference at Rice University, and participants at the Women and Political Parties conference at the University of Iowa for helpful comments and feedback. We also thank Grant Farrington, Henry Watson, and the many undergraduate research assistants who coded sponsorship and cosponsorship activity.

Competing interest. The authors have no competing interests.

Notes

1. See Atkinson and Windett's (2019) study of masculine and feminine issues for an important exception. In a study of the Senate, Swers (2013) examines Republican women's legislative activity on national security issues.
2. Some studies describe these issues that directly impact women and their roles in society as feminist issues (i.e., Bratton and Haynie 1999; Dodson 2006; Swers 2002). We characterize them as women-focused policies because they address issues often described as feminist, but with more conservative policy solutions. For example, as an alternative to paid family leave, a Republican bill will create a workplace flexibility policy allowing for employees to choose to take time off in lieu of overtime pay (see HR 1 (105th) and HR 1380 (106th) Cass Ballenger (R-NC), HR 1189 (108th) Judy Biggert (R-IL), HR 6025 (110th) Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), and HR 1406 (113th) Martha Roby (R-AL)). This policy is generally opposed by feminist and labor groups who fear it will lead to employers forcing employees to take time off instead of receiving overtime wages.
3. For example, in the 103rd Congress, Nancy Johnson's (R-CT) bill HR 3523 allowing homemakers a full IRA deduction was categorized in the major category, "Macroeconomics" and the minor category "Taxation, Tax Policy, and Tax Reform." However, William Baker's (R-CA) similar bill HR 4215 increasing the deduction for retirement savings to permit non-employed spouses a full IRA deduction was categorized in the major category, "Labor, Employment, and Immigration," and the minor category "Employee Benefits." Both of these bills are aimed at providing retirement benefits for spouses who stay at home, a majority of whom are women, and we include them in our tax social welfare category.
4. We also used a 50% threshold and the results are the same.

5. We thank Gary Jacobson for providing data on district level presidential vote. Other district level data for the 103rd–113th Congresses comes from: Foster-Molina, Ella. 2017. "Historical Congressional Legislation and District Demographics 1972–2014." Harvard Dataverse, V2.
6. Data for seniority, majority party, and party leadership comes from Volden and Wiseman's (2014) Legislative Effectiveness data. Party leaders include the Speaker, Majority/Minority Leader, Majority/Minority Whip, Conference Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary, Chief Deputy Whip, Policy Committee Chair, and Campaign Committee Chair.
7. We thank Pamela Bam for providing committee membership data.
8. We use zero-inflated Poisson models in the sponsorship models to account for the large number of zero-value observations in the count data.
9. We also analyzed defense and military social welfare policy and found minimal gender differences.
10. The overall magnitude of these differences is small because members generally do not sponsor social welfare tax bills. However, the issue is as substantively important as taxes or any other policy area that occupies a greater share of the legislative agenda.
11. Ros-Lehtinen retired in 2017. Granger retired in 2024.
12. Conservative men are predicted to sponsor 0.04 bipartisan bills.
13. The predicted values in Figure 4 also indicate that conservative women see the most action on their tax social welfare proposals. This is an interesting dynamic since moderate women sponsor more tax social welfare bills than conservative women, and conservative women are predicted to sponsor fewer of these bills than conservative men. The party may want to highlight women as championing these tax proposals that address the needs of women, children, and families.

References

- Adler, E. Scott, and John D. Wilkerson. 2013. *Congress and the Politics of Problem Solving*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Adler, E. Scott, and John Wilkerson. 2022. *Congressional Bills Project: 1993–2014*. NSF 00880066 and 00880061.
- Anzia, Sarah F., and Christopher R. Berry. 2011. "The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?" *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (3): 478–93.
- Atkinson, Mary Layton. 2020. "Gender and Policy Agendas in the Post-War House." *Policy Studies Journal* 48 (1): 133–56.
- Atkinson, Mary Layton, Reza Mousavi, and Jason H. Windett. 2023. "Detecting Diverse Perspectives: Using Text Analytics to Reveal Sex Differences in Congressional Debate About Defense." *Political Research Quarterly* 76 (1): 75–89.
- Atkinson, Mary Layton, and Jason Harold Windett. 2019. "Gender Stereotypes and the Policy Priorities of Women in Congress." *Political Behavior* 41 (3): 769–89.
- Barnes, Tiffany D. 2016. *Gendering Legislative Behavior: Institutional Constraints and Collaboration*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnes, Tiffany D., Victoria D. Beall, and Erin C. Cassese. 2021. "American Party Women Redux: Stability in Partisan Gender Gaps." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54 (3): 406–10.
- Barnes, Tiffany D., and Erin C. Cassese. 2017. "American Party Women: A Look at the Gender Gap within Parties." *Political Research Quarterly* 70 (1): 127–41.
- Bauer, Nichole M. 2020. *The Qualifications Gap: Why Women Must Be Better than Men to Win Political Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bawn, Kathleen, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Maskett, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2012. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (3): 571–97.
- Betz, Timm, David Fortunato, and Diana Z. O'Brien. 2021. "Women's Descriptive Representation and Gendered Import Tax Discrimination." *American Political Science Review* 115 (1): 307–15.
- Bratton, Kathleen A., and Kerry L. Haynie. 1999. "Agenda Setting and Legislative Success in State Legislatures: The Effects of Gender and Race." *Journal of Politics* 61 (3): 658–79.

- Celis, Karen, and Sarah Childs. 2018. "Conservatism and Women's Political Representation." *Politics & Gender* 14 (1): 5–26.
- Continetti, Matthew. 2022. *The Right: The Hundred-Year War for American Conservatism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Crandall-Hollick, Margot L. 2021. "The Child Tax Credit: Legislative History." *Congressional Research Service*. December 23, 2021.
- Crowder-Meyer, Melody, and Rosalyn Cooperman. 2018. "Can't Buy Them Love: How Party Culture among Donors Contributes to the Party Gap in Women's Representation." *Journal of Politics* 80 (4): 1211–24.
- Dannenfelser, Marjorie. 2020. *Life Is Winning: Inside the Fight for Unborn Children and Their Mothers*. West Palm Beach, FL: Humanix Books.
- Deckman, Melissa. 2016. *Tea Party Women: Mama Grizzlies, Grassroots Leaders, and the Changing Face of the American Right*. New York: New York University Press.
- Dittmar, Kelly, Kira Sanbonmatsu, and Susan J. Carroll. 2018. *A Seat at the Table: Congresswomen's Perspectives on Why Their Presence Matters*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dodson, Debra L. 2006. *The Impact of Women in Congress*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dovi, Suzanne. 2002. "Preferable Descriptive Representatives: Will Just Any Woman, Black, or Latino Do?" *American Political Science Review* 96 (4): 729–43.
- Egan, Patrick J. 2013. *Partisan Priorities: How Issue Ownership Drives and Distorts American Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Franceschet, Susan, Jennifer M. Piscopo, and Gwynn Thomas. 2016. "Supermadres, Maternal Legacies and Women's Political Participation in Contemporary Latin America." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 48 (1): 1–32.
- Freeman, Jo. 1986. "The Political Culture of the Democratic and Republican Parties." *Political Science Quarterly* 101 (3): 327–56.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Grossmann, Matt, and David A. Hopkins. 2016. *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, Richard L. 1996. *Participation in Congress*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Harbridge, Laurel. 2015. *Is Bipartisanship Dead?: Policy Agreement and Agenda-Setting in the House of Representatives*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Holman, Mirya R., Jennifer L. Merolla, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister. 2016. "Terrorist Threat, Male Stereotypes, and Candidate Evaluations." *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (1): 134–47.
- Huddy, Leonie, and Nayda Terkildsen. 1993. "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates." *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (1): 119–47.
- Jacobs, Lawrence, and Theda Skocpol. 2015. *Health Care Reform and American Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know*, 3rd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kalaf-Hughes, Nicole, Jason A. MacDonald, and Lauren M. Santoro. 2022. "Congresswomen, Legislative Entrepreneurship, and the Basis for Effective Legislating in the U.S. House, 1973–2008." *Politics & Gender* 18 (3): 640–71.
- Kittilson, Miki Caul. 2008. "Representing Women: The Adoption of Family Leave in Comparative Perspective." *Journal of Politics* 70 (2): 323–34.
- Koger, Gregory. 2003. "Position Taking and Cosponsorship in the U.S. House." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 28 (2): 225–46.
- Lawless, Jennifer L., Sean M. Theriault, and Samantha Guthrie. 2018. "Nice Girls? Sex, Collegiality, and Bipartisan Cooperation in the US Congress." *Journal of Politics* 80 (4): 1268–82.
- Lazarus, Jeffrey, and Amy Steigerwalt. 2018. *Gendered Vulnerability: How Women Work Harder to Stay in Office*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Lewis, Jeffrey B., Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, Adam Boche, Aaron Rudkin, and Luke Sonnet. 2022. *Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database*. <https://voteview.com/>.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'." *Journal of Politics* 61 (3): 628–57.

- Mettler, Suzanne. 2011. *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Noel, Hans. 2013. *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Osborn, Tracy L. 2012. *How Women Represent Women: Political Parties, Gender, and Representation in the State Legislatures*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Palmer, Barbara, and Dennis Michael Simon. 2008. *Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling: Women and Congressional Elections*. New York: Routledge.
- Pearson, Kathryn, and Logan Dancey. 2011. "Speaking for the Underrepresented in the House of Representatives: Voicing Women's Interests in a Partisan Era." *Politics & Gender* 7 (4): 493–519.
- Petrocik, John R. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (3): 825–50.
- Phillips, Anne. 1995. *The Politics of Presence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pope, Jeremy C., and Jonathan Woon. 2009. "Measuring Changes in American Party Reputations, 1939–2004." *Political Research Quarterly* 62 (4): 653–61.
- Reilly, Caitlin. 2024. "Tax Bill Overcomes Objections from Left and Right, Passes House." *Roll Call*. January 31, 2024.
- Reingold, Beth, Kerry L. Haynie, and Kirsten Widner. 2020. *Race, Gender, and Political Representation: Toward a More Intersectional Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reingold, Beth, Rebecca J. Kreitzer, Tracy Osborn, and Michele L. Swers. 2021. "Anti-Abortion Policymaking and Women's Representation." *Political Research Quarterly* 74 (2): 403–20.
- Reingold, Beth, and Michele Swers. 2011. "An Endogenous Approach to Women's Interests: When Interests Are Interesting in and of Themselves." *Politics & Gender* 7 (3): 429–35.
- Roberti, Amanda. 2021. "'Women Deserve Better': The Use of the Pro-Woman Frame in Anti-abortion Policies in U.S. States." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 42 (3): 207–24.
- Rolfes-Haase, Kelly L., and Michele L. Swers. 2022. "Understanding the Gender and Partisan Dynamics of Abortion Voting in the House of Representatives." *Politics & Gender* 18 (2): 448–82.
- Rosenthal, Cindy Simon. 1998. *When Women Lead: Integrative Leadership in State Legislatures*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sanbonmatsu, Kira. 2002. *Democrats, Republicans, and the Politics of Women's Place*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Schreiber, Ronnee. 2008. *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sherlock, Molly F. 2023. "Employer Tax Credit for Paid Family and Medical Leave." *Congressional Research Service*. February 27, 2023.
- Shogan, Colleen J. 2002. "Speaking Out: An Analysis of Democratic and Republican Woman-Invoked Rhetoric of the 105th Congress." *Women & Politics* 23 (1–2): 129–46.
- Sides, John. 2006. "The Origins of Campaign Agendas." *British Journal of Political Science* 36 (3): 407–36.
- Skocpol, Theda, and Vanessa Williamson. 2012. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stein, Jeff. 2017. "Marco Rubio, Mike Lee Push Plan to Raise Corporate Tax Rate, Give Benefits to the Poor." *Washington Post*. November 29, 2017.
- Swers, Michele L. 2002. *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Swers, Michele L. 2005. "Connecting Descriptive and Substantive Representation: An Analysis of Sex Differences in Cosponsorship Activity." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 30 (3): 407–33.
- Swers, Michele L. 2013. *Women in the Club: Gender and Policy Making in the Senate*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Swers, Michele L. 2018. "From the Republican Revolution to the Tea Party Wave: Republican Women and the Politics of Women's Issues." In *The Right Women: Republican Party Activists, Candidates, and Legislators*, eds. Shauna Shames and Malliga Och. Santa Barbara: Praeger Press.
- Swers, Michele L. 2023. "After Dobbs: The Partisan and Gender Dynamics of Legislating on Abortion in Congress." *The Forum* 21 (2): 261–85.

- Swers, Michele L., and Carin Larson. 2005. "Women and Congress: Do They Act as Advocates for Women's Issues." In *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*, eds. Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Thomsen, Danielle M., and Michele L. Swers. 2017. "Which Women Can Run? Gender, Partisanship, and Candidate Donor Networks." *Political Research Quarterly* 70 (2): 449–63.
- Volden, Craig, and Alan E. Wiseman. 2014. *Legislative Effectiveness in the United States Congress: The Lawmakers*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Volden, Craig, Alan E. Wiseman, and Dana E. Wittmer. 2013. "When Are Women More Effective Lawmakers Than Men?" *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (2): 326–41.
- Volden, Craig, Alan E. Wiseman, and Dana E. Wittmer. 2018. "Women's Issues and Their Fates in the US Congress." *Political Science Research and Methods* 6 (4): 679–96.
- Weeks, Ana Catalano. 2022. *Making Gender Salient: From Gender Quota Laws to Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, Rick K., and Cheryl D. Young. 1997. "Cosponsorship in the U.S. Congress." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 22 (1): 25–43.
- Wineinger, Catherine N. 2022. *Gendering the GOP: Intraparty Politics and Republican Women's Representation in Congress*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wineinger, Catherine, and Mary K. Nugent. 2020. "Framing Identity Politics: Right-Wing Women as Strategic Party Actors in the UK and US." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 41 (1): 91–118.
- Winter, Nicholas J. G. 2010. "Masculine Republicans and Feminine Democrats: Gender and Americans' Explicit and Implicit Images of the Political Parties." *Political Behavior* 32 (4): 587–618.
- Wolbrecht, Christina. 2000. *The Politics of Women's Rights: Parties, Positions, and Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Michele L. Swers is Professor of Political Science at Georgetown University: mls47@georgetown.edu.

Danielle M. Thomsen is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine: dthomsen@uci.edu

Cite this article: Swers, Michele L., and Danielle M. Thomsen. 2025. "Understanding the Policy Priorities of Republican Women in the US House of Representatives." *Politics & Gender* 21, 306–332. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X24000515>