

Getting a High Heel in the Door: An Experiment on Gender Gaps in Women's Organizational Lobbying

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Abstract

Are women in office more likely to provide access to women's lobby groups than men in office? If so, how can women's strategic lobbying increase the responsiveness of male legislators? This paper presents a field experiment examining how women and men in state legislatures respond differently to women's organizational lobbying. My findings suggest that substantial gender gaps do exist; women are twice as likely to respond to a women's issue lobbyist's simple meeting request. That said, meeting requests signaling constituent mobilization have heterogeneous effects across legislator gender, doubling the likelihood that a male legislator will respond and effectively closing gender gaps in responsiveness. My results identify how women's lobbying can employ distinct lobbying strategies on descriptive and non-descriptive representatives to successfully gain their attention. In distinguishing differing pathways towards maximizing opportunities for women's substantive representation, this paper importantly informs womens groups lobbying in state legislatures, wherein low levels of descriptive representation often persist.

1 Introduction

Studies of women’s representation largely confine their focus to mechanisms of descriptive representation, often proposing that women are best served by elected officials with whom they share a marginalized gender identity (Phillips 1998; Sapiro 1981; Williams 1998, e.g.). This focus is well-merited; an impressive body of literature demonstrates that legislators are likely to take increased interest and action on behalf of constituent groups that share their descriptive characteristics (Broockman 2013; Burden 2007; Butler and Broockman 2011; Canon 1999; Carnes 2012; Grose 2005; Reingold 2000; 1992; Whitby 2000). Women in politics bring gendered life experiences to political institutions, ultimately reflecting different interests than their male counterparts (Gilligan 1992; Mansbridge 1998; Sapiro 1981; Thomas 1991). Research suggests that political activity by female legislators is substantively different than male legislators otherwise similar in partisanship, seniority, and district characteristics (Dodson et al. 2006; Reingold 2008). In state legislatures specifically, Holman and Mahoney (2018) find that especially with the presence of a woman’s caucus, increases in women’s aggregate descriptive representation leads to increases in women’s collaboration on women’s interest legislation (even across party lines).

If descriptive representation leads to substantive representation, the current political outlook in American legislative politics looks historically hopeful for women. The 2018 election cycle brought the proportions of women serving in state legislatures to new heights. Women now make up 28.7% of all state legislators nationwide, marking a sizable increase from 25.1% in 2017.¹ In states like Nevada (50% women) and Colorado (47% women), women’s numerical representation in state legislatures mirrors that in the general population, achieving a representational ideal of proportionality optimal for aggregative and deliberative democracy (Mansbridge 1998).

Nevertheless, the impressive electoral gains for female descriptive representation in 2018 did not extend consistently across the United States. In 17 states, women make up less than 25% of legislators; this statistic fails to reach even 20% in 6 of these states. Women living in states like West Virginia (14.2% women), South Carolina (15.9% women), and Mississippi (13.8% women) face a dramatically less positive outlook if descriptive representation constitutes the only clear pathway towards substantive representation. For the numerous states in which the number of women elected into office fails to keep up with national gains, the exploration of alternative means towards the representation of women’s political voice becomes vital.

Women’s organized advocacy might be one way in which women’s representation can be achieved in the face of low levels of descriptive representation. On the national level, organized interests influence politicians and policy through a number of strategies with varying levels of success (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Grasse and

¹For a full breakdown of women serving in state legislatures in 2019, see the Center for American Women and Politics online at <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts>.

Heidbreder 2011; Kollman 1998, e.g.).² Strategic lobbying activities available to state-level women’s advocacy organizations to gain attention from state legislators can provide an important link to women’s substantive representation. However, if women’s organized advocacy can be instrumental in women’s representation for states with low levels of descriptive representatives, a prerequisite is that men must be responsive to women’s issue groups. The field experiment presented in this paper explores this prerequisite, focusing on a group’s ability to secure legislative access.

Lobbying groups can utilize different strategies for outreach depending on whom within the legislature they target for access; with less certain allies, a group can use stronger lobbying tactics to underline their potential value to a legislator. Based on the links between descriptive and substantive representation, I argue that female legislators will be more likely than their male counterparts to provide a women’s issue group access at face value. However, I also argue that this baseline gender gap should render the effectiveness of different lobbying tactics heterogeneous across gender. If women in office are likely to be responsive to a women’s group regardless, heightened lobbying tactics signaling electoral or informational benefits are unlikely to affect observable change. In contrast, I argue that male legislators should be more sensitive to the same heightened lobbying tactics, shaping an environment wherein the effectiveness of a women’s issue lobbying strategy in securing legislative access depends on a legislator’s gender identity.

Little is currently understood about how descriptive representation is linked to the inclusion of marginalized groups advocacy organizations in policymaking. In fact, lobbying is often studied with an eye towards its relationship with representational inequity. Thus counterintuitively, this paper identifies how lobbying in state legislatures can help facilitate, rather than inhibit, increased democratic inclusion. Women’s organizational lobbying emerges as having strong potential power to effectively close observed gender gaps in legislative responsiveness, increasing opportunities for women’s substantive representation overall.

2 Organizational Influence and Access

In order to have influence on the legislative process, an advocacy organization must have access to legislators. A lobbyist or organization’s access to policy-makers is considered essential by political analysts and advocates alike (Austen-Smith 1993; Herndon 1982; Langbein 1986; Ornstein and Elder 1978; Sabato 1985; Snyder Jr 1990). Sabato notes (1985, 127), “political analysts have long agreed that access is the principal goal of most interest groups, and lobbyists have always recognized access is the key to persuasion.” Organizational access thus marks a crucial gateway to further policy influence; without it, influence in policymaking is improbable. Therefore, a study of the conditions under which a legislator grants access to an advocacy organization is effectively a study

²Notably, the study of interactions between legislators and lobbyists in subnational contexts represents yet another area in need of increased scholarly attention (Anzia 2019)

of the conditions under which influence becomes possible.

While access to political decision-makers, the ability to get a “foot in the door,” is fundamental to political influence, it is also unequally distributed (Dahl 1957; 1961; Garson 1974; 1978; Lowi 1979). Inequalities in access are paramount to the study of marginalized group influence in particular, as “old boys” networks shape uneven opportunities for insider and outsider groups. That said, even amongst mainstream and insider organizations, access to elected officials is not guaranteed to all groups who ask. A legislator’s time is limited, fixed, and valuable. As such, legislators cannot provide access to all groups hoping to collaborate on policy or share policy preferences (Hall 1996).

It is important to note that access does not necessarily lead to significant influence on legislative decisions on policy formation. While access provides the critical opportunity to have group concerns heard, it does not guarantee that a legislator will take action on a group’s insight, requests, or advice. But group access is a reflection of *inclusion* in the policymaking process, which is of paramount importance to this paper. Historically, marginalized groups have been ineffective at influencing policy that might otherwise challenge social and institutional inequality in large part as a result of barriers to access. Therefore, given that access is important, privileged, and reflective of a legislator’s priorities, it is highly relevant for observation and analysis in and of itself.

2.1 Benefits from Providing Access

What influences an individual legislator to set aside time to hear the group’s concerns? My expectations in answering this question rely on a theoretic framework similar to Hall and Deardorff’s (2006) model of lobbying as a legislative subsidy. To assess the value of providing a group access, legislators estimate the benefits of time spent with that group given the costliness of their time. I characterize the potential benefits to legislators in providing an advocacy organization legislative access under three categories: electoral, informational, and intrinsic. Electoral benefits relate to how much electoral payoff a legislator can expect by working with a particular issue group. For instance, a legislator is likely to estimate attractive benefits from providing access to or partnering with a group with strong capacities to mobilize his or her constituents or to contribute to his or her campaign. Informational benefits are more broadly defined, as valuable information can take many forms.³ Generally speaking, however, informational benefits emerge, in Hall and Deardorff’s (2006, 69) terms, as a “legislative subsidy,” or an offer of any valuable information to relieve the legislator of some of their work-burden in policymaking.

Finally, benefits can also arise intrinsically, i.e. from the positive or negative feelings a legislator gets from working with or on behalf of a particular group (Broockman 2013). Intrinsic benefits relate to a legislator’s

³For a full discussion and analytic model of the different forms of valuable information interest groups and lobbyists can offer to individual legislators, see Hall and Deardorff (2006)

personal preferences and life experiences. For a marginalized group facing structural barriers to access, intrinsic benefits become a critical factor to consider, as a legislator’s own experience of marginalization as a member of a particular identity group can shape their political priorities. As Burden (2007) argues, legislators use their personal preferences in making decisions on how to vote, which bills to sponsor, and how to allocate their time. While an elected official’s personal preferences, ideologies, and life experiences are difficult to reliably measure, theories of descriptive representation suggest that legislators emerging from distinctive identity groups (especially those facing historic marginalization) are expected to prioritize the interests of their identity group in solidarity (Dawson 1995; Gay 2004). In fact, intrinsic motivations to represent one’s marginalized identity in part form the basis for arguments underlining the *need* for descriptive representation in democracy. Phillips (1998) argues that descriptive representation allows women to give voice to preferences, issues, and interests previously overlooked in political deliberation. Importantly, great tension in the literature exists regarding any individual descriptive representative’s ability to represent the diverse interests of an entire marginalized sub-population (Dovi 2002, e.g.). The link between female legislators and the prioritization of “women’s issues” broadly defined must be probabilistic, as the connections between descriptive identity and legislative behavior is far from absolute. However, evidence does suggest that when the links between descriptive and substantive representation do emerge, they are motivated intrinsically (Broockman 2013, e.g.). It is therefore reasonable to consider the intrinsic, more psychological benefits an elected official might derive from providing access to a group with whom they share common life experiences or identities.

2.2 Benefits and Allies

Whether the benefits of working with an advocacy organization derive electorally, informationally, or intrinsically, the greater the benefits a legislator attributes to time spent with an advocacy organization, the more likely the legislator will be to accept a meeting request from that organization. For a legislator, perceived benefits must arise out of an overlap between his or her policy priorities and the group’s. The resulting implication is that lobbying groups will have the most success accessing legislators with whom this overlap is clear— in other words, with legislators they understand to be allies. How a legislator perceives the benefits of working with an organization shapes the strength of potential alliances between legislator and group. While some alliances between legislator and group might be relatively strong, alliances with other legislators might be less certain. Ultimately, an advocacy organization can use different strategic lobbying tactics to alter a legislator’s perceptions of the benefits they offer, bolstering ties to less certain legislative allies and increasing their likelihood for access.⁴

⁴This expectation speaks well to the current lobbying literature, which both theoretically proposes and empirically observes that lobbyists are most likely to target their allies in their varied strategies at influencing policy and policy-makers (Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Schlozman and Tierney 1986).

For an advocacy organization representing an historically marginalized group, alliances based on intrinsic benefits are once again of particular interest. Links between descriptive and substantive representation would suggest that men and women in office are motivated differently to respond to a women’s advocacy organization based on a gender group affinity (intrinsic benefits). This paper thus argues that female legislators will be more likely than their male counterparts to provide access to a women’s group, all else being equal.⁵ *I therefore predict that at a baseline level of responsiveness, with no additional lobbying tactics to increase legislative responsiveness used, there will be a gender gap in the likelihood a legislator will provide access to a women’s organization.*

2.3 Strengthening Alliances with Strategic Lobbying

Legislator perceptions of intrinsic benefits, especially as they arise from elements of descriptive representation, cannot be easily manipulated by an advocacy organization: a lobbyist cannot change a legislator’s experience of in-group or out-group gender identity.⁶ In contrast, a legislator’s perception of a group’s electoral or informational benefits *are* changeable. As such, where intrinsic benefits are unavailable or where alliances are relatively weaker, an advocacy organization can use additional strategic lobbying tactics to strengthen potential alliances by emphasizing the electoral or informational benefits they can offer to a legislator. My field experiment thus manipulates an organization’s use of lobbying strategies that signal electoral or informational benefits to evaluate their impact on the responsiveness of legislators- both male and female- to a women’s group.

Past studies of lobbying activity have identified two strategic methods to successfully achieve legislative inclusion, each of which provide either informational or electoral benefits (Burststein and Linton 2002; Grossman and Helpman 2001; Kollman 1998, e.g.). First, advocacy organizations can utilize what are commonly known as “inside strategies” for lobbying (Gais and Walker 1991; Grossman and Helpman 2001; Kollman 1998). Inside strategies refer to the provision of specialized information, or “legislative subsidies.” In offering legislative subsidies, an advocacy organization can make the provision of access to their organization more likely. Empirically, the value of lobbying in terms of information and expertise provision is widely explored (Austen-Smith 1993; Austen-Smith and Wright 1996; Hansen 1991; Potters and Van Winden 1992; Rasmusen 1993; Wright 1996). Additionally, organizational surveys (Berry 1977; Heinz et al. 1993; Nownes and Freeman 1998; Schlozman and Tierney 1986; Gais and Walker 1991) confirm the validity of models asserting the informational benefits of lobbying, describing the activities undertaken by most strategic interest groups as aimed at gathering and providing expertise to lawmakers. *I thus expect that inside lobbying tactics, or meeting requests specifically*

⁵Partisanship can complicate this expectation, as some women’s organizations have partisan leanings that could shape natural *electoral* allies rather than natural *intrinsic* allies. With this in mind, my experimental research design uses an advocacy organization dedicated to a non-partisan women’s issue: supporting female victims of sex-trafficking. I also conduct regression analyses using controls for legislator party, which can be viewed in the Appendix.

⁶This assertion is, in fact, open for debate. In theory, an organization can prime a legislator’s in-group intrinsic motivations, or potential affinity towards that group, with strategic language emphasizing identity. Future research might investigate the degree to which identity-priming strategies might work to links between descriptive representatives and marginalized group advocates.

signalling that an organization can offer valuable expertise, will increase legislative responsiveness to a women's advocacy organization.

Advocacy organizations can also utilize “outside strategies” in lobbying. “Outside” lobbying strategies denote attempts to mobilize constituent or public support to affect greater legislative attention and political action (Goldstein 1999; Kollman 1998). Organizations wield valuable power to shape constituent opinion, which can in turn shape legislator behavior (Grossman and Helpman 2001). Scholars observe “outside lobbying” to have noteworthy influence on the choices of elected officials (Kollman 1998), and advocacy organizations large and small are often credited with pivotal roles in mobilizing public opinion campaigns to measurably shape policy outcomes across diverse issues (Skocpol et al. 1993; Soule and Olzak 2004; Weldon 2002; 2012). An advocacy organization can use outside lobbying tactics to make engaging with their organization appear electorally beneficial. *I thus expect that if a women's organization uses outside lobbying tactics on a legislator when requesting access, their likelihood of seeing a response will increase. In turn, I also predict that the greatest increase in responsiveness will emerge when a women's organization utilizes both inside and outside lobbying tactics simultaneously.*

Finally, given my expectations that a gender gap *will* emerge in the baseline responsiveness to a women's organization, I argue that both inside and outside lobbying tactics are likely to have a greater impact on men than on women. The logic here is quite straightforward: when an organization seeks access to a legislator to discuss an issue that legislator cares little about, the provision of extra incentives to pay attention to their group is worthwhile. But if the organization is seeking access to a strong ally, the investment in extra lobbying should have little effect on the already high likelihood of response. *I therefore test the prediction that inside and outside lobbying tactics will have heterogeneous effects on male and female legislators, showing a relatively strong impact on men but a limited effect on women.*

The study of organizational access, especially for organizations seeking increased representation for marginalized groups, has much to gain from assessing how descriptive and non-descriptive representatives differ in their willingness to include such groups in the policymaking process. While women's organizations might face gender gaps in seeking legislative attention, they might also possess the power through strategic lobbying to *bridge* gender gaps. Such power could be pivotal in state level politics, where gains for women and women candidates often lag behind those in the national political arena.⁷ The remainder of this paper applies these motivations to a pre-registered experimental design.⁸

⁷My experiment focuses on gender gaps as they relate to legislative responsiveness to a women's issue group specifically. While I argue that gender gaps in responsiveness to a women's issue group are a function of intrinsic benefits, my study cannot confidently determine if instead female legislator's higher responsiveness to *all* issue groups is in fact the driving mechanism. The decision not to test for this alternative mechanism was carefully made with a mind towards ethics. I speak to this point further in my concluding discussion, but a more in-depth discussion can also be found in my Appendix.

⁸A Pre-analysis for this study was registered with the Open Science Framework in June of 2018.

3 Experimental Design

I designed and implemented an auditing experiment that sends a sample of 600 state legislators across 8 states an email containing a meeting request from a fictitious women’s organization dedicated to advocating on behalf of female victims of sex trafficking. For my experimental treatments, I manipulate the text of the emails, randomly assigning legislators into four treatment groups receiving varied requests for a meeting: one group signaling constituent mobilization, one group signaling expertise collection, one group containing both signals, and a control group receiving a simple meeting request signaling neither inside nor outside lobbying activity. Legislative access was then operationalized by measuring the response rates to the meeting request, allowing me to make comparisons across treatment groups as well as across gender.

A research design utilizing randomized field experimentation is optimal to my investigation in two critical ways. First, the use of randomization in the experiment allows me to account for confounding variables such as partisanship and ideology. Second, observational inquiry into the inclusion of special interest groups in policymaking faces significant endogeneity problems. Looking retrospectively at lobbying partnerships between women’s issue groups and individual legislators, it is impossible to determine if the group’s lobbying tactics triggered legislator responsiveness or if the group targeted legislators whom they knew would respond. This issue of reverse causality is only heightened when considering my interest in isolating gender, a strong potential confounding variable, from the influence of lobbying tactics on access provision. Experimental analysis allows me to disentangle lobbying tactics from shared gender identity as they influence legislator responsiveness independently.

3.1 The Sample

My population of interest is the universe of state legislators in the United States. For ethical reasons, I select a sample of U.S. states from which to draw state legislators that is as limited in number as possible to maintain statistical power. I include elected officials from Michigan, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Missouri, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and California.⁹ In determining which states to include in the study, I faced certain practical obstacles in terms of timing and sample size. Numerically, I needed to strike a delicate balance in reaching the threshold of individual male and female legislators to provide sufficient statistical power while simultaneously ensuring that the experiment extend into as few states as possible. At the same time, the experimental conditions required that each legislature be in session through the period in which the experiment would be fielded. Within these limitations, however, I carefully select states to maintain balance within the sample in terms of professionalism in the legislature, the proportion of women’s serving in the legislative body, and overall partisan composition. A full discussion of state-level descriptive statistics for these three variables

⁹For each of these states, I confirm that the state legislature publishes direct email addresses for individual legislators.

is presented in the Appendix.

Table 1 presents state-level descriptive statistics for these three variables. For legislative professionalism, I refer to the second dimension measurements collected by Bowen and Green (2014) with Rosenthal’s (2000)’s conceptualization of legislative professionalism in mind. I utilize this measurement strategy in light of the potential relationships between legislative staff support and benefits to policymakers in providing access to interest groups. Differences across states in the degree to which legislatures are support-intensive and work-intensive (Bowen and Greene 2014) might shape differences in the way individual legislators value the expertise of interest groups. I include states with high levels of professionalism expecting that such states should provide for the most conservative estimates of positive effects. That said, maintaining balance within the sample is also critical towards my objective of evaluating differences in gender across various types of legislatures, including those that are more likely to prioritize interest group incorporation.

I thus also pay close attention to variation in gender compositions in my process for state selection. Scholars of the links between women’s descriptive representation and substantive representation debate the importance of “critical mass” in shaping whether female representatives will emerge as activists for women’s issues rather than “token” women within an institution (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007; Dahlerup 1988; Kanter 1977). I therefore take care to include states with both high and low proportions of female legislators in order to account for potential institutional differences in how women officeholders prioritize partnerships with women’s issue groups. Because this paper is motivated by an interest in states with particularly low levels of women’s descriptive representation, I include states like South Carolina and Pennsylvania with especially few women in office, while also including Rhode Island as a state with a relatively high proportion of female legislators. The remaining states fall around, if not slightly below, the 2018 nationwide average (25.3%). All data on state legislature gender composition was gathered using reports published by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP 2017).

Finally, states sampled for experimental analysis reflect the best balance in overall partisan composition possible. As shown in Table 1, the states included in the experiment represent both Republican and Democratic controlled legislatures, varying in terms of strength of majority party. In the aggregate sample of legislators across all eight states, 64.1% are Democrats. Past research demonstrates nuanced relationships between gender and political party. Partisan gaps among female congressional officeholders, for instance, have grown over the past 30 years, shaped by gendered differences across party in recruitment practices and campaign contributions (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Thomsen and Swers 2017). Among elected female representatives, Swers (2002) finds that Democratic and Republican women diverge in their tendencies towards women’s issue activism at the federal level, especially in varying contexts of partisan control. Ideologically, Osborn et al. (2019) show that female state legislators are increasingly more polarized than their male colleagues, with important impli-

cations for women’s representational policymaking. If Democratic and Republican women legislate differently—not just from men, but from each other—it is important to attend to potential partisan-gender differences in responses to my experimental stimuli.

However, given the partisan gaps across women officeholders overall, the number of Republican women in my sample is limited, rendering a confident examination of these partisan dynamics largely out of reach. I account for partisanship in my experimental design with my selection of states, my choice of the relatively non-partisan issue of sex trafficking, and finally with my use of block randomization by party and state in selecting the sample of male participants to mirror the sample of female legislators. Nonetheless, I do estimate a triple interaction analyses between gender, party, and treatment group in order to provide some exploratory insight. The results of these regressions are presented in the Appendix along with a more in-depth discussion.¹⁰

For each of the states in the study, I include all female representatives in my sample. An equal number of male legislators are randomly selected to match the female legislators in number, state, and party.¹¹ I then randomly assign legislators to treatment groups across the entire sample, subsequently testing my randomization scheme for any differences across gender or party. The results of this χ^2 test were successful, producing a p value = .8934. Importantly, this experiment was approved in expedited review by my university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Nonetheless, auditing experiments on public officials by academics must be carefully designed with attention to ethics. A full discussion of my ethical considerations and use of deception can be seen in the Appendix.

3.2 Experimental Stimuli and Treatment Conditions

The experimental stimulus consists of a meeting request to discuss issues of sex trafficking, with specific emphasis placed on assistance to victims of sex trafficking rather than to the policing of sex traffickers. Support for victims of sex trafficking represents an optimal choice for a “women’s issue” in that it is both non-partisan and relatively non-salient.¹² If the issue had been drawing heavy attention in the media or considered “owned” by a particular party (Petrocik 1996), discerning whether differences in responsiveness stemmed from experimental stimuli or

¹⁰All triple interaction analyses are estimated using state-fixed effects. Given the limited power of these analyses, results should not be interpreted as strong or conclusive evidence.

¹¹Statistical power computations indicate that a sample size of at least 70 women is necessary per treatment condition, thus demanding a total sample of at least 280 female legislators.

¹²The definition of “women’s issues” in politics is challenging if not outright problematic. Osborn (2014, 149) articulates this problem questioning whether one can define “a group of ‘women’s issues’ on which women legislators, regardless of party ideology, might work together due to shared gendered interests” (149). However, she does provide a useful rubric for women’s issue identification based on past research, defining women’s issues as falling into one (or more) of three categories. First, policy issues regulating or explicating women’s rights, such as those related to anti-discrimination law (Wolbrecht 2000). Second, issues that disproportionately affect female constituencies, such as domestic violence, reproductive health, etc. (Reingold 2000; Swers 2002). Third, policy issues related to women’s traditionally defined roles in the “private sphere,” such as childcare, education, or other “ethic of caring” issues (Gilligan 1992; Thomas 1991). Sex trafficking thus falls under the second classification of a women’s issue. The Polaris Project estimates that globally, 75% of victims of sex trafficking are female. While there is no official estimate of the number of victims in the United States, of the 8,524 individual cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in the year 2017, 7,067 were female.

from concerns of partisanship or salience would be impossible.¹³ The meeting requests appeared to come from a newly-formed organization of local women dedicated to assisting fellow-female victims of sex trafficking.¹⁴ Each emailed meeting request contained the subject “Women Against Violence and Exploitation,” in order to send a strong signal of the group’s collective identity. Women Against Violence and Exploitation (WAVE) was also the name of the organization engaging in experimental outreach, and was a fictitious organization I created for the purposes of this study.¹⁵¹⁶ Meeting requests were delivered to each legislator on their direct email address, a method for outreach frequently utilized in each of the states included in the study.¹⁷

Within the text of each emailed meeting request, I independently manipulated a mobilization treatment factor and an expertise treatment factor. The randomly assigned treatments consisted of two levels, yielding four total treatment arms. The control condition for mobilization factor sent a simple meeting request to introduce the group and speak about the importance of policy supporting the victims of sex trafficking. In contrast, the mobilization condition for this factor included a reference to a working petition on the importance of sex trafficking policy. The email’s language emphasized the group’s success in mobilizing the legislator’s constituents specifically, and stated that the petition had already been signed by a specific number of constituents residing in the most populous counties and/or cities within the legislator’s district.¹⁸ The control condition for expertise factor once again contained a simple request to meet, while the treatment condition underlined the organization’s collection of expertise specific to the most populous counties legislator’s district. The email text for all four treatment arms can be viewed in the Appendix.

The experimental output then observes if and how the legislative office responded to the meeting request.¹⁹ I fielded the experiment from April 10-12, 2018. Each legislator was allotted 10 business days to respond to the meeting request. For legislators responding to the meeting request, I subsequently sent an email informing them that the organization was suspending action on the project indefinitely. While these emails were sent from the fictitious organizer and only to those legislative offices that responded to the initial request, a final debriefing

¹³I assert the issue of sex trafficking to be relatively non-salient based on the fact that it is not an issue typically listed amongst those of top concern to voters (such as issues of abortion). Nor has a substantial national movement or focusing event occurred nationally to increase the prominence of the issue (such as #metoo). That said, while variation in issue salience across state as well as legislative district can be expected, I also expect the variation to be accounted for by my randomized design.

¹⁴That the organization appeared newly-formed was advantageous for my research design in that legislators could have no prior beliefs about the organization’s political prominence or potential for expertise provision and constituent mobilization. This kept the validity of my treatments intact, while also creating a least-likely test scenario to best understand responsiveness to a women’s group as it could differ across gender, all else held equal. Legislators are *least* likely to respond to a meeting request from a group they know nothing about, and responsiveness can be measured in terms of the group’s identity and message alone rather than on prior conceptions of a value to partnership with that group.

¹⁵In fact, I created eight different WAVE organizations, one for each state included in the study, as the organizations were intended to be state-level and state specific rather than nationally organized.

¹⁶In an additional measure to maximize external validity, I created a website for each state level organization. After the signature line of each emailed meeting request, I provided a link to the fictitious organization’s website (e.g. <http://www.waveforca.org>).

¹⁷Prior to the study, conversations with lobbyists and advocacy organizations in each of the states confirmed that scheduling requests are often communicated through email, and that legislators are attentive to their email accounts. I also confirmed with these contacts that the text of my emailed requests was standard and appropriate for my purposes.

¹⁸The specific number was calculated by taking 0.5% of the figure for voting population in each legislator’s district. This number was non-negligible, but was also relatively low to minimize deception and to avoid arousing suspicion.

¹⁹A detailed description of the coding process with which I measured “responsiveness” can be found in the Appendix.

email was then delivered on June 22, 2018 from my personal email account.²⁰

3.3 Experimental Results and Analysis

Across the eight state legislatures included in the study, 254 out of the 600 legislators emailed responded to the women’s organization’s meeting request, yielding an overall response rate across all legislators of 42.3%. Each response was carefully coded to produce different measures of legislative responsiveness. A description of my coding protocol and the various responsiveness measures can be seen in the Appendix. Following Butler and Broockman (2011) and Broockman (2013), I analyze an objective binary dependent variable for if the organization received a response from the legislative office contacted.²¹

Table 3 shows the rates of response broken down by treatment groups as well as by legislator gender, evaluating gender gaps across the treatment groups, the control groups, and the overall sample. Additionally, the final row in this table shows the differences across gender for each treatment group and for the total sample. Among the emails that did not signal any specific lobbying tactics, 52.3 percent of female legislators responded whereas only 23.5 percent of male legislators responded, a large and statistically significant difference of 28.7 percentage points ($p = .0005$). Across the entire sample, the 12 percentage point difference in response rates across women (48.3%) and men (36.3%) in office was also statistically significant, demonstrating a clear gender gap. On its face, the results support my expectation that men and women in office respond at different rates to a women’s organizational meeting request assuming no additional lobbying tactics. Nonetheless, while differences are strong across the control groups and the sample at large, gender gaps are not consistent across treatment groups. Interestingly, there appears to be almost no difference in the response rates between female legislators and male legislators in the mobilization treatment group. The difference across gender within the combined treatment group is also relatively small; none of the treatment groups saw significant gender gaps in response rates.

Taking a closer look at the differences in response rates across treatment and control groups, Table 4 shows treatment effects overall, evaluating gender gaps in treatment effects specifically. Overall, the mobilization treatment effect had a positive and significant effect on legislator responsiveness to a women’s group meeting request, increasing the likelihood a legislator would respond by 17.3 percentage points. But this overall effect might derive from the treatment’s effect on male legislators specifically. Significant differences emerge across gender in observed treatment effects, providing support for my expectations that men would see greater change

²⁰This final debriefing concluded the experiment by extending full disclosure (as required by my University Institutional Review Board). It contained a clear and careful description of the experiment’s design and purposes. Prior to sending the final debriefing email, I contacted at least three state-level organizations that do work in sex trafficking in each state, receiving approval to include that organization’s name (and legislative point of contact) for reference should any legislator be interested in legislative action on the issue. This seemed critically important to maximize the long-run potential net benefits.

²¹I also collected data on whom within the office responded (legislator or staff member) and with whom the meeting would be scheduled, and found no real change in the substance or significance of the results using these alternative ordinal dependent variables.

in responsiveness from additional lobbying tactics. While the mobilization treatment had an impressive impact on male legislators, increasing their response rate by a substantial and significant 29.5 percentage points, female legislators saw only a slight increase in the likelihood of response. Similarly, the combined treatment effects also show an overall positive effect on legislator response rate. However, whereas men saw a strong and statistically significant increase of 19.1 percentage points ($p = .02$) in response to the combined treatment, women in office were actually less likely to respond (though this difference also fails to reach statistical significance).

For a more thorough examination of the findings presented in Tables 3 and 4, I conduct an OLS regression analysis predicting whether the legislative office responded to the emailed meeting request sent by the fictitious women’s advocacy organization. Importantly, interpretations of these analyses and those regression analyses that follow must account for the fact that I could not randomize legislator characteristics, and some confounding variables might therefore be at play. With this in mind, additional models evaluating state fixed effects and controlling for specific legislator characteristics are included in the Appendix, the results of which are all consistent with those presented below.

I estimate a baseline model (1) first which predicts effects of the experimental treatments without the inclusion of (female) gender interactions by treatment group, and then estimate a full interaction model (2), adding the interaction terms to test the hypotheses that the relationship between the experimental groups and response rates differ based on a legislator’s gender.

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1(Mobilization_i) + \beta_2(Expertise_i) + \beta_3(Combined_i) + \beta_4(Female_i) + u_i. \quad (1)$$

$$Y_i = \beta_5 + \beta_6(Mobilization_i) + \beta_7(Expertise_i) + \beta_8(Combined_i) + \beta_9(Female_i) + \beta_{10}(Mobilization_i) * (Female_i) + \beta_{11}(Expertise_i) * (Female_i) + \beta_{12}(Combined_i) * (Female_i) + u_i. \quad (2)$$

The regression results presented in the coefficient plot in Figure 1²² strengthen the conclusions drawn from Tables 3 and 4. First, interacting the treatment groups by gender adds important nuance. The baseline model appears to underestimate the influence of gender substantially. Whereas the baseline model predicts that female legislators are 11.3 percentage points more likely to respond to the women’s meeting request, the interaction model predicts this positive increase at 26.5 percentage points. Employing an F-test to compare the nested models in the two regressions produces a statistically significant χ^2 statistic of 6.7891 ($p = .07$). I can therefore confirm that female legislators not only respond differently to the women’s advocacy group’s request for access

²²Table 5 in Appendix shows these results in table form as well.

at the baseline, but to the organization’s lobbying tactics as well.

The heterogeneous effects show particularly interesting results for male legislators. In the interaction model, the coefficient for male legislators receiving the meeting request signaling constituent mobilization estimated an increase in response rate by 27.1 percentage points. Looking at the negative and statistically significant coefficient for female legislators, the net effect of signaling constituent mobilization on women in office is estimated at virtually zero. Furthermore, the coefficient estimated for male recipients of the mobilization treatment mirrors the estimated difference between female and male legislators; lobbying tactics signaling constituent mobilization appears to close the gender gap almost entirely. Figure 2 underlines this point well by comparing the predicted rates of response for men and women in office in the control groups and the mobilization treatment groups. While 50.1 percent of women in the control group are predicted to respond to the women’s meeting request, only 23.6 percent of men in the control group are predicted to respond. This marks a statistically significant difference of 26.5 percentage points. In contrast, men in the mobilization treatment group are predicted to respond at a rate of 50.7 percent, which exceeds the predicted rate of women in the mobilization treatment group by a statistically insignificant 0.9 percentage point.

The regression results also show that the effect of the combined treatment on men is positive and statistically significant while being entirely negated by the statistically significant negative coefficient estimated for women. In fact, the net effect of the combined treatment on female legislators is unexpectedly negative albeit small (-.037). Figure 3 depicts these results graphically as well. It should be noted, however, that given the non-effects of the expertise treatment, it is likely that the constituent mobilization piece of the combined treatment drives these results.

Ultimately, the experimental results produce strong findings. Lobbying tactics that signal an organization’s ability to provide electoral benefits to a legislator can act as additional persuasion for a legislator to provide access. Informational benefits seem to have less of an influence on access provision, at least in this context, as emphasis on expertise provision failed to trigger any strong increases in the rates of response. But significant gender gaps emerge in observed responsiveness to a women’s group: when additional lobbying tactics that emphasize electoral or informational benefits are *not* employed, women’s groups are likely to see more success targeting female legislators for access than male legislators. The results of this experiment suggest that by signaling electoral benefits, a women’s advocacy group can effectively tighten *if not close* gender gaps in responsiveness. Whereas women in office might be more likely allies to women’s organizations than men, women’s organizations can use strategic lobbying tactics to shift the balance in their favor. On the other hand, my findings also suggest a ceiling effect in efforts to lobby female legislators, wherein additional lobbying tactics fail to provoke any real increase in the rate of response.

4 Discussion

I conducted a field experiment to explore the opportunities offered by women’s advocacy for increased women’s organizational inclusion in the legislative process. I argued that women in office would be more likely allies to a women’s issue group than men in office, and as such more likely to respond to a women’s issue group’s meeting request. I also predicted that while additional lobbying tactics signaling electoral and informational benefits to a legislator would increase responsiveness, such lobbying tactics would face ceiling effects when targeting female legislators. Men, in contrast, would show substantial room for improvement in their base-level responsiveness; they would thus be influenced strongly and positively to the same organizational lobbying tactics that proved effectively inconsequential for women.

My analysis showed substantial support for these predictions, revealing interesting and conditional gender gaps in the ways men and women in office respond to women’s advocacy and varying lobbying tactics by a women’s group in their willingness to provide access. Women in office appear to matter for organizations advocating on a women’s issue, increasing a group’s potential for access and inclusion. My research lends strong support for links between descriptive and substantive representation while at the same time presenting this linkage through the previously understudied lens of lobbying and organized advocacy. In turn, I also show that by leveraging a legislator’s electoral self-interest, a women’s group can indeed garner attention from those in office who at first glance might be overlooked as unexpected allies. More generally, it appears from this experiment that a group’s intrinsic value and electoral value can matter a great deal for lobbying efforts seeking access to legislators.

In contrast, a group’s informational value did not appear to matter at all. The lack of evidence supporting my prediction that expertise provision should stimulate increased access provision is puzzling, and merits further investigation. Given that extant literature characterizes the inclusion of lobby groups in policymaking in terms of “legislative subsidies” (Hall and Deardorff 2006), why did the offer of specialized expertise not increase legislative interest? The answer might relate back to Mayhew’s (1974) seminal work, such that electoral incentives are the principal driver of a legislator’s behavior in this scenario as well. My results definitely indicate that for male state legislators, the “electoral connection” (Mayhew 1974) is strong; a petition with only .5% of support by registered voters more than doubled their likelihood to provide access. However, the null results might also be reflective of experimental design. The value of expertise might relate to its source, and it is possible that expertise provision from an unknown organization without more informative references was insufficient to provoke increased attention. Therefore, the weakness of the expertise treatment relative to the more explicit mobilization treatment is also worth consideration in these unexpected findings.

A few additional questions remain unanswered. First, these findings arise out of an examination of responsiveness to a women’s group advocating on the needs of victims of sex trafficking. Sex trafficking can be defined

as a women’s issue in that it predominantly effects women specifically, but it is unique in comparison to other issues traditionally defined as “women’s issues” such as abortion or reproduction issues (Reingold 2000; Swers 2002, e.g.) or anti-discrimination issues (Wolbrecht 2000, e.g.) in that it cannot be easily tied to a particular ideology or political party. It remains unclear if the trends observed above with regards to gender gaps and constituent mobilization lobbying hold if the women’s organization of interest is advocating on an issue more partisan, or more salient. Additional research is thus needed before these results can be broadly generalizable to lobbying efforts of all women’s issue groups in U.S. states.

Second, my theory rests on the assumption that the mechanisms linking descriptive and substantive representation for women derive from intrinsic benefits. But this represents only one side of the story. In fact, scholars propose two central theories to explain the linkages between descriptive and substantive representation: the first explanation is intrinsically or personally motivated, but scholars have also often suggested that linkages between descriptive and substantive representation arise from how legislators perceive the strength of electoral support offered by in-group constituencies. If a legislator perceives a great deal of electoral potential for a given constituency group, they are likely to allocate more time to address policy issues specific to that particular constituency, and vice versa; they are likely allies to that constituency group and their policy preferences. There thus remains an underlying question as to what drives the gendered differences I observe in this experiment. Broockman’s (2013) field experiment speaks elegantly to this debate in the literature, examining intrinsic versus extrinsic (i.e. political or electoral) motivations behind the links between descriptive and substantive representation amongst black politicians. His findings do support the conclusion that shared group identity shape the links between descriptive and substantive representation with regards to race. In terms of gender scholarship, compelling research also suggests that women in office often *feel compelled* to, in Pitkin’s (1967), “stand in” and “act for” women as a group (Carroll 2002; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002). As such, I believe my assertions that the gender gaps observed here reflect intrinsic benefits of descriptive representation are well-founded. But future examination of these trends should pay more comprehensive attention to disentangling these two driving potential mechanisms.²³

Finally, in limiting my field experiment to the examination of lobbying tactics of a women’s issue group only, I leave another question unanswered regarding mechanisms and gender gaps in legislative responsiveness. That is, are women in office more responsive than their male counterparts to basic requests for access by interest groups across all issue areas? Given female legislators’ greater disposition towards the prioritization of constituency services (Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2018; Richardson Jr and Freeman 1995), there is reason to expect women in office to more readily respond to group requests for meetings (or to simply pay closer attention to their legislative emails). The question as to whether the gender gaps emergent in this study relate to differences in responsiveness

²³A deeper discussion of these issues can be found in the Appendix, and is discussed in relation to results of my triple-interaction analyses.

to women’s advocacy groups or advocacy groups at large remains unclear, and merits further investigation. But importantly, this experiment was designed in order to speak to advocacy organizations seeking progress on women’s representation specifically, especially in states where progress in levels of descriptive representation continues to lag. For such organizations, the source of gender gaps in legislative responsiveness to their efforts for inclusion is largely irrelevant. What matters is that these gaps have been observed to exist, and that they have also been shown to be bridgeable. Furthermore, within the study of interest groups and lobbying, very little is currently understood about how legislators respond to and engage with groups that advocate on issues that disproportionately affect women. This paper represents an effort to fill that gap in the literature.

This study and its findings have substantial implications for women’s representation in the U.S. state legislatures. A great deal of important policy making impacting the everyday lives of women in the United States happens in state legislatures. Women in office matter for women, but in states like Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama where (as of 2018) women make up 14.5, 14.9, and 15 percent of the state legislature respectively (CAWP 2018), alternative mechanisms for increased representation for women are crucial. By shedding light not only on gender gaps in representation, but also on how gender gaps can be closed for overall increases substantive representation, this research can act as a beacon for women’s organizations who might otherwise overlook under-explored pathways towards progress.

5 Tables and Figures

Table 1: State Level Descriptive Statistics

	Partisan Balance	Gender Balance	Legislature Professionalism	Legislators in Sample
California	D (68.3%)	22.5%	2.974	53
Massachusetts	D (79.5%)	25.5%	-1.132	100
Michigan	R (60.8%)	25.0%	0.274	74
Missouri	R (72.1%)	22.3%	-0.737	90
Pennsylvania	R (62.1%)	18.6%	1.566	96
Rhode Island	D (85.5%)	31.0%	-1.064	70
South Carolina	R (63.5%)	14.1%	-0.468	52
Wisconsin	R (63.7%)	22.7%	0.017	65

Table 2: Response Rates by State

	% Response	% Female Response	% Male Response	Gender Gap	N
California	37.7%	44.4%	30.7%	13.7%	53
Massachusetts	36.0%	38.0%	34.0%	4.0%	100
Michigan	55.4%	64.8%	45.9%	18.9%	74
Missouri	33.3%	46.7%	20.0%	26.7%	90
Pennsylvania	36.5%	41.7%	31.2%	10.4%	96
Rhode Island	36.8%	37.1%	40.0%	-2.9%	70
South Carolina	34.6%	38.5%	30.7%	7.7%	52
Wisconsin	72.3%	81.3%	63.6%	17.6	65

Table 3: Response Rates by Gender and Treatment Group

	Control	Mobilization	Expertise	Combined	Total Sample
Overall	37.3% N = 150	54.0% N = 150	36.0% N = 150	46.0% N = 150	42.3% N = 600
Female Legislator	52.3% N = 65	53.6% N = 84	40.7% N = 76	46.6% N = 75	48.3% N = 300
Male Legislator	23.5% N = 85	53.5% N = 66	29.7% N = 74	42.6% N = 75	36.3% N = 300
Gender Differential	28.7*** (p = .00)	.6 (p = 1)	11.0 (p = .21)	4.0 (p = .74)	12.0*** (p = .00)

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: Differences in Response Rates

	Mob. Treatment - Control	Exp. Treatment - Control	Combined Treatment - Control
Overall	17.3*** p = .00	-.6 p = 1	8.6 p = .16
Female Legislator	1.2 p = 1	-11.5 p = .23	-5.6 p = .62
Male Legislator	29.5 *** p = .00	6.2 p = .48	19.1** p = .02

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

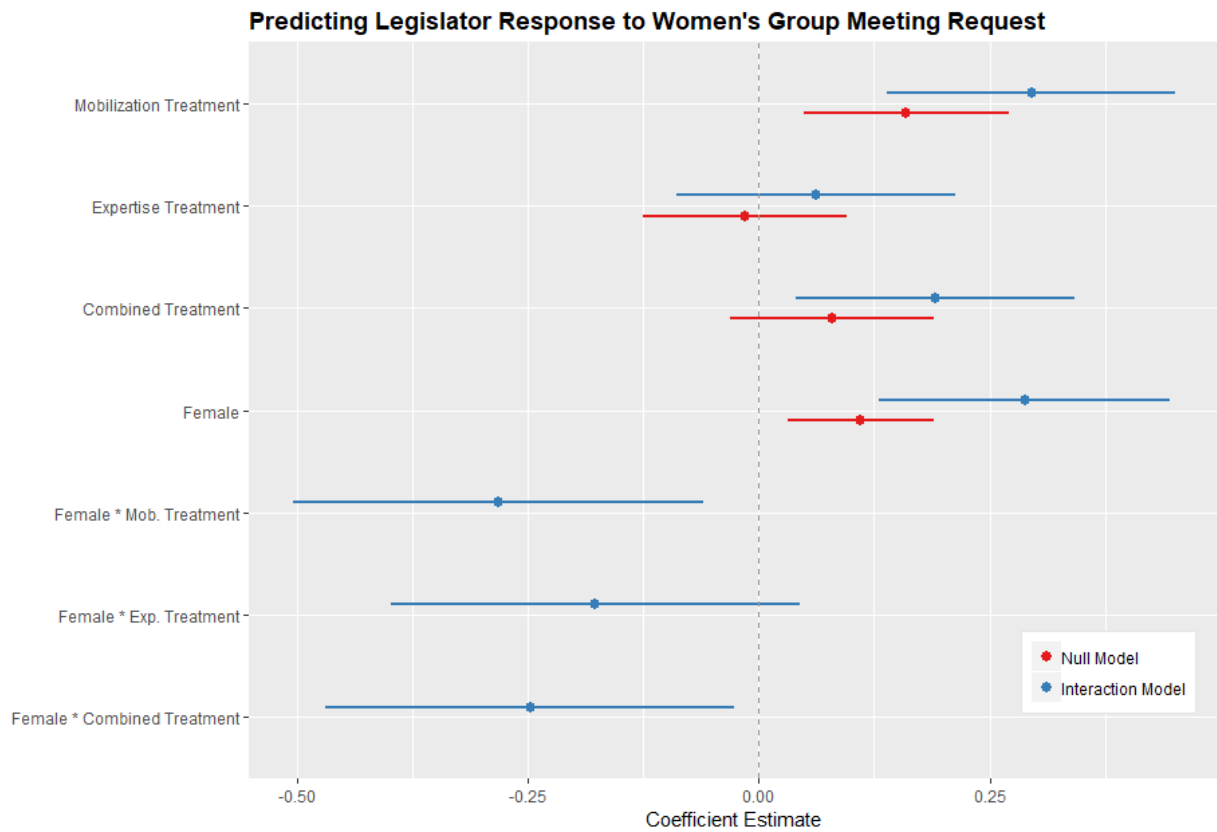


Figure 1: All coefficients presented with 95% confidence intervals.

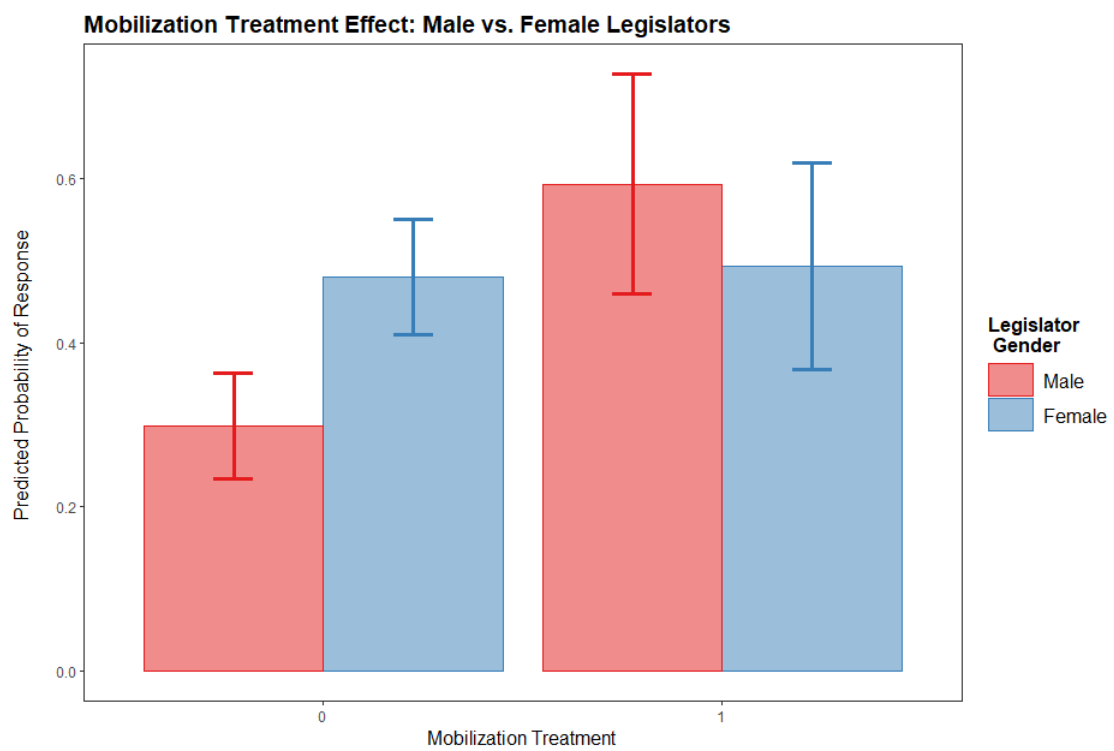


Figure 2:

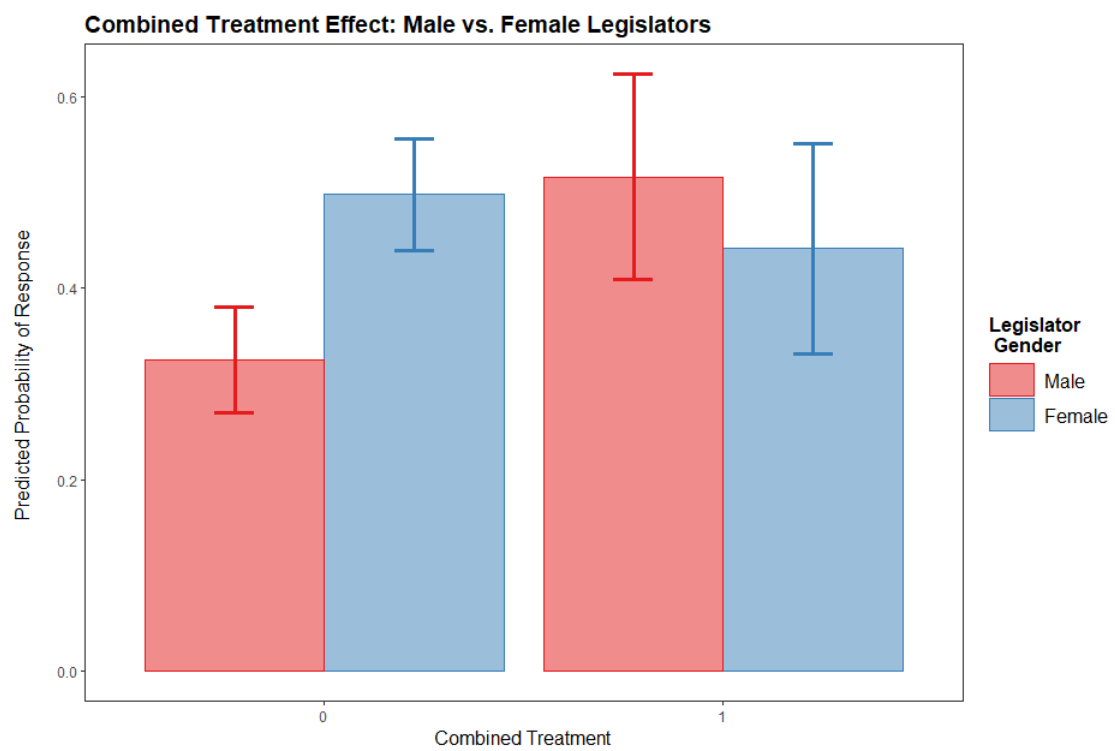


Figure 3:

6 Appendix

6.1 Texts of Emailed Meeting Requests

MOBILIZATION CONTROL CONDITION; EXPERTISE CONTROL CONDITION

SUBJECT: Women Against Violence and Exploitation
BODY:

Dear [LEGISLATOR NAME],

My name is [ORGANIZER NAME] and I am the Lead Organizer and Legislative Director with Women Against Violence and Exploitation (WAVE) for [STATE]. WAVE works in communities across [STATE] to promote increased protections for victims of sex trafficking in our state. We would love the opportunity to meet with you to introduce our organization and share some of the work we are doing locally.

If you cannot be available, we'd like to arrange a meeting with a legislative aid, in person or by phone from your office.

Could you be available during [DATES]? We are looking for just 30 minutes to introduce ourselves and have our concerns heard.

Looking forward to hearing from you on what time might work well and who we can expect to meet with.

Thanks in advance,

[ORGANIZER NAME]
[ORGANIZATION NAME]
[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

MOBILIZATION TREATMENT CONDITION; EXPERTISE CONTROL
CONDITION

SUBJECT: Women Against Violence and Exploitation

BODY:

Dear [LEGISLATOR NAME],

My name is [ORGANIZER NAME] and I am the Lead Organizer and Legislative Director with Women Against Violence and Exploitation (WAVE) for [STATE]. WAVE works in communities across [STATE] to promote increased protections for victims of sex trafficking in our state. We would love the opportunity to meet with you to introduce our organization and share some of the work we are doing locally.

WAVE has been especially successful with our mobilization efforts in your district. In [DISTRICT COUNTIES] and in neighborhoods across your district, we have already gathered over [NUMBER CONSTITUTING 5% of DISTRICT REGISTERED VOTERS] hand-written signatures on a petition expressing urgent concern for the issue of sex trafficking in local communities, and we would love the opportunity to deliver our petition in person at the meeting as well.

If you cannot be available, we'd like to arrange a meeting with a legislative aid, in person or by phone from your office.

Could you be available during [DATES]? We are looking for just 30 minutes to introduce ourselves and have our concerns heard.

Looking forward to hearing from you on what time might work well and who we can expect to meet with.

Thanks in advance,

[ORGANIZER NAME]

[ORGANIZATION NAME]

[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

MOBILIZATION CONTROL CONDITION; EXPERTISE TREATMENT
CONDITION

SUBJECT: Women Against Violence and Exploitation

BODY:

Dear [LEGISLATOR NAME],

My name is [ORGANIZER NAME] and I am the Lead Organizer and Legislative Director with Women Against Violence and Exploitation (WAVE) for [STATE]. WAVE works in communities across Rhode Island to promote increased protections for victims of sex trafficking in our state.

We work with experts in the field, and have some groundbreaking research we feel can help the constituents in [DISTRICT COUNTIES] specifically. We would love the opportunity to meet with you to introduce our organization, share some of the work we are doing locally, and discuss some of our policy research.

If you cannot be available, we'd like to arrange a meeting with a legislative aid, in person or by phone from your office.

Could you be available during [DATES]? We are looking for just 30 minutes to introduce ourselves and have our concerns heard.

Looking forward to hearing from you on what time might work well and who we can expect to meet with.

Thanks in advance,

[ORGANIZER NAME]

[ORGANIZATION NAME]

[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

SUBJECT: Women Against Violence and Exploitation
BODY:

Dear [LEGISLATOR NAME],

My name is [ORGANIZER NAME] and I am the Lead Organizer and Legislative Director with Women Against Violence and Exploitation (WAVE) for [STATE]. WAVE works in communities across Rhode Island to promote increased protections for victims of sex trafficking in our state.

We work with experts in the field, and have some groundbreaking research we feel can help the constituents in [DISTRICT COUNTIES] specifically. We would love the opportunity to meet with you to introduce our organization, share some of the work we are doing locally, and discuss some of our policy research.

WAVE has been especially successful with our mobilization efforts in your district. In [DISTRICT COUNTIES] and in neighborhoods in your district, we have already gathered over [NUMBER CONSTITUTING 5% OF DISTRICT REGISTERED VOTERS] hand-written signatures on a petition expressing urgent concern for the issue of sex trafficking in local communities, and we would love the opportunity to deliver our petition in person at the meeting as well.

If you cannot be available, we'd like to arrange a meeting with a legislative aid, in person or by phone from your office.

Could you be available during [DATES]? We are looking for just 30 minutes to introduce ourselves and have our concerns heard.

Looking forward to hearing from you on what time might work well and who we can expect to meet with.

Thanks in advance,

[ORGANIZER NAME]
[ORGANIZATION NAME]
[ORGANIZATION WEBSITE]

6.2 Model Included in Paper: Table Form

Table 5: OLS Model Presented in Figure 1

	<i>Dependent variable: Legislator Response</i>	
	y1	
	(baseline Model)	(Model Interacting Treatment by Gender)
Mobilization Treatment	0.159*** (0.057)	0.295*** (0.080)
Expertise Treatment	-0.015 (0.056)	0.062 (0.077)
Combined Treatment	0.079 (0.056)	0.191** (0.077)
Female	0.111*** (0.040)	0.288*** (0.080)
Female * Mobilization Treatment		-0.282** (0.113)
Female * Expertise Treatment		-0.177 (0.113)
Female * Combined Treatment		-0.248** (0.113)
Constant	0.312*** (0.043)	0.235*** (0.053)
Observations	600	600
Residual Std. Error	0.488 (df = 595)	0.486 (df = 592)
F Statistic	5.313*** (df = 4; 595)	4.120*** (df = 7; 592)
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

6.3 Ethical Considerations and the Use of Deception

This experiment required a substantial degree of deception, and each design element was thus carefully considered with an eye towards ethics, no matter how small. Most broadly, there were two nontrivial and necessary elements of deception were incorporated. The first was the inability to pursue informed consent. By necessity, the information provided to legislators as the subjects of this experiment was limited and experimentally manipulated. This deception was unavoidable in order to validly observe legislator behavior. If legislators were informed that the requests for meetings were a part of an auditing study, especially one seeking to identify gender gaps in responsiveness to women as a marginalized group, it would have likely changed their behavior

substantially.

The second necessary element of deception was the use of a fictitious organization (and thus a fictitious organizer and meeting request). The research design was rooted in a wide variety of past auditing experiments, but paid close attention to the experiment fielded by Kalla and Broockman (2016) on the influence of campaign contributions on access provision by federal lawmakers to an advocacy organization. Kalla and Broockman (2016) partnered with an actual organization, CREDO Action, in their experimental design, and I thus initially set out to do the same. I reached out to more than 20 state-level women’s issue advocacy organizations across the country to discuss what a potential partnership might look like. Eight of these initial lines of inquiry resulted in further interest, and three of those resulted in in-person meetings for more in-depth discussions of logistics. However, none of these partnerships were able to eventuate.

While my efforts ultimately failed, this initial and extensive organizational outreach underlined the widespread and substantial benefits of pursuing the study.²⁴ Despite declining my invitation for participation, organizations were clear in their emphatic support of my research questions and objectives. One representative came from a local advocate speaking about her own state-level lobbying efforts with a women’s organization focused on sex-trafficking,

“I feel confident about getting with women on these programs, and we have a confidence working together. But I know there must be men out there, too, who want to be leaders for the women in their districts. This research could help, I want to know what works, and I want to have some hope about that. There is an opportunity here, I think, and what you’re doing could be really important.”

My initial organizational outreach also left me confident about the value of utilizing a fictitious organization as an alternative. The use of fictitious organizations minimizes the burden placed on legislators, as well as the potential harm caused by the experiment and its necessary deception. In his own experiment on public officials, Putnam (1993, 73) describes his own standard in this regard by attempting a balance in treatment that is “slightly deceptive, but innocuous and highly informative.” With this standard in mind, I designed an experiment that *requests* each legislator’s time, but that never ultimately requires any of it. Once legislator responsiveness was recorded as the outcome variable for the study, each legislator received an email indicating that the organization was no longer seeking the meeting. Had the study moved forward working with actual advocacy organizations, it would have resulted in a potentially high number of relatively insubstantial meetings, conducted mainly for the sake of research. Such meetings could thus be considered a waste of time for both legislator and advocacy organization, time that might have been used for work on more imminent policy-making. Finally, utilizing a fictitious organization on which legislators could have no prior beliefs came with strong methodological advantages. Prior beliefs about an organization’s capacity to mobilize potential

²⁴This outreach also provided strong qualitative background evidence, and prompted the subsequent follow-up study exploring how gender identity and legislative alliances shape the strategic choices of women’s issue lobbyists.

voters or about their resources and reputation in providing policy expertise in legislators would have seriously crippled the exogeneity of both treatments, rendering the experiment effectively meaningless.²⁵

One consequence of the use of a fictitious organization, however, required additional attention in the final experimental design. While none of the legislative meetings with my fictitious organization could take place, the meeting request itself might have sparked legislative interest in the issue of sex trafficking that might have otherwise not arisen. Therefore, in order to ensure that any potential benefit to the victims of sex trafficking through increased legislative interest might be realized as a result of my experimental stimuli, I acquired the permission of state-level women's organizations working on issues of sex trafficking in each state to include their contact information in the study's final debriefing emails. This added measure ensured that should any legislator be interested in taking action with an organization on the issue of sex trafficking, he or she would have a clear avenue to do so. Each of the 600 debriefing emails thus included at least two state-specific organizational references and persons of contact would could be open and available to meet on issues of sex trafficking for legislators' benefit. Notably, after debriefing all 600 legislators included in the experiment, I received only four responses- all of which were positive, expressing interest in participating in future research should I be pursuing it.

Another noteworthy element of deception resulting from my use of a fictitious organization relates to the email texts for the mobilization condition of my experimental treatments. Within this email text, I falsely claimed that .5% of registered voters within each state legislator's constituency had signed a petition underlining concern for local issues of sex trafficking. I chose this particular percentage of registered voters after considerable conversation with interest group activists and organizational advocates in each of the states included in the study, with the intention of identifying a number that would not be considered by legislators to represent a widespread, pronounced, or overwhelming surge of constituent activity. The experimental treatment was designed to signal a group's interest in mobilization efforts rather than a groundswell of constituent behavior. I considered refraining from using any number at all, but background research with state-level lobbyists confirmed my suspicions that the *lack* of a numerical reference would detract from the experimental treatment's validity. The number of signatures referenced was estimated by me as well as by my organizational contacts as optimal for conveying my intended experimental signal while at the same limiting the level of necessary deception regarding activities within a legislative district. The debriefing emails sent to all legislators included in the study from my personal, institutional email address described this element of deception (and every element of deception more generally) in detail.

Importantly, thoughtful consideration of both non-trivial elements of deception guided me in a significant

²⁵In order to ensure that the fictitious organization's email request appeared credible and that the organization itself appeared legitimate, a link was provided in the close of each email to an organizational website. Each website was identical aside from state-level facts and statistics about sex trafficking to ensure consistency across the experimental design.

decision limiting the experimental design as it was originally conceived. My paper is careful to note that increased responsiveness of female legislators to a women's issue group might be driven by mechanisms other than intrinsic benefits; it is possible that women in office are more responsive to *all* issue groups, independent of the group's gendered issue area. My original research design spoke to this alternative mechanism, and included a non-gendered fictitious group in addition to a women's issue fictitious organization. However, this doubled the size of the experiment, and thus doubled the degree of necessary deception. Given that my interest in this line of research stems predominately from a focus on increasing opportunities for political representation of women and marginalized groups more generally, I estimated that the added value of isolating the mechanism driving gender gaps was tangential to the underlying purpose of the research: to identify if gender gaps exist in *women's issue group* responsiveness, and in turn how these gender gaps might be bridged with changes in group lobbying strategy. As such, I concluded that the ethical costs of doubling the size of the experiment and levels of deception exceeded the benefits offered, and removed my investigation of this alternative mechanism from the research design.

In the end, all of the ethical considerations for necessary experimental deception were tantamount for IRB expedited review and approval process. Over the course of IRB review process, two main points emerged particularly important. First, it was vital to the IRB that my initial attempts to partner with a non-fictitious advocacy organization were exhaustive (which they were). These efforts ultimately spoke to the credibility of my assertion that a fictitious organization as an element of deception was, in fact, unavoidable and necessary. It was important to demonstrate that I had spent significant time and resources pursuing alternative experimental approaches.

Second, successful expedited IRB approval demanded a timely, detailed, and fully transparent debriefing process.²⁶ More specifically, that the debrief be clear and place prominent emphasis on all deceptive procedures related to the use of a fictitious organization was paramount to IRB approval. Given that the experimental treatments required the provision of misinformation about district level activity and policy needs—not only for the constituent mobilization condition (as discussed above) but also the expertise provision condition—it was critical to IRB approval that these measures of deception be completely outlined. It was also important that they be sufficiently justified with regards to the study's larger purpose for research. Explicit clarity was also required regarding all experimental procedures and preparations. Ultimately, there were two rounds of reviews and changes before the final debriefing language could be approved.

²⁶Originally, I had opted *against* using a debrief for participants in the study, estimating potential costs to future researchers of state politics as well as to organizations lobbying at the state level that could arise from negative legislator reactions. That said, the IRB contended that these costs were overestimated, and strongly argued that the failure to debrief legislators about the substantial measures of deception could not be ethically supported. In the end, I conceded this point. Additionally, it is worth noting once more that legislator responses to the debriefing were *not* negative, and were in fact positive overall.

6.4 Coding Protocol for Measuring Responsiveness

To measure the outcome variable of interest, I blindly coded three different measures of legislator responsiveness for each scheduling request administered:

1. A binary measurement for if there was any response from the legislator or their office at all
2. An additional binary measurement for if the legislator or his/her office responded positively to the email request, where 0 indicates no response whatsoever OR a decline of the request and 1 signifies a response that attempted to schedule some sort of meeting
3. A ranking from 1-6 that categorizes responses, measuring interest in a meeting by ranking with whom the meeting would be scheduled

Each email was carefully read and judged as to how the responses wording indicates with whom the meeting would take place. For instance, if the response came from the legislators scheduling staffer and stated, "I am emailing to schedule a meeting between you and Rep. X," or "Rep. X requested that I touch base with you to schedule a meeting," I coded this response as a 1 in the ranking below despite the fact that the response technically came from a staffer and not the legislator themselves.

I used these state specific specifications to code within the 1-6 outcome measure outlined below:

1. A response indicating the intention to schedule a meeting with the Member of General Assembly or State Senator (best outcome)
2. A response indicating the intention to schedule a meeting with a Upper Level Staffer
3. A response indicating the intention to schedule a meeting with a Lower Level Staffer
4. A response limited to a simple clarification question as to whether meeting should be in district or capital. This specification is coded here because while it does not express interest in a meeting explicitly, the presence of a response is a step up from an outright no to the request or a failure to respond at all. The fact that there is a response does seem to imply an interest in some kind of meeting, but there is no way to know with whom in the legislative office the meeting would take place.
5. A response indicating that no meeting would be possible
6. No response (worst outcome)

Many legislators had automatic responses set up on their email accounts. These were largely uniform in their content, emphasizing that emailing is important and that one can expect a delay in response due to the high number of emails received each day. I did not consider these replies as "responses" in the measurements

described above. In fact, I only coded responses that were directly addressed to the fictitious organizer for each state. If I received no other response outside the automatic reply, the legislator received a score of 6 in the measurement above. Further, in the first binary measurement for any response at all, I coded legislators from whom I only received the automatic reply as a 0.

In collecting data on responsiveness for later analysis, I anticipated problems in equating a non-response with a missing response; I wanted to avoid equating a legislator who did not see the organization’s email request with a legislator that opened the emailed request and chose not to respond. I thus sought out a email tracking service that could collect data on if and when each email was opened (and whether the link provided at the end of each email had been clicked). Unfortunately, the tracking service failed to provide complete data: approximately 70% of the data was lost.

6.5 Robustness Checks

For additional robustness checks, Table 6 shows the results to models adding state fixed effects to those presented in Figure 1 (and Table 5). Table 6 does not include any individual legislator controls; the regressions in Tables 7 make this addition. Table 6 shows that adding state fixed effects to the model does not result in any substantive changes to the results. Evaluating the difference between the nested models produces a χ^2 value of 6.8117, which is statistically significant at a 10% level with a p-value of .07815.

The controls included then added in Table 7 reflect legislator characteristics that are expected to influence a legislator’s likelihood to respond to a women’s advocacy group’s request on sex trafficking. I thus include a control for membership in the Democratic party, as Democrats might be more inclined to view women as strong or critical constituency group than Republicans given partisan gender gaps; a control for lower chamber membership, as legislators in the lower chambers might have less demands on their time and thus an increased likelihood to respond to the organization’s meeting request; and a third control for relevant committee membership, as legislators on committees that oversee issues of sex trafficking might be more likely to respond to a group working on such an issue. Both the baseline model as well as a model interacting treatment group by gender are displayed in columns one and two. Testing the statistical difference between these two models once again yields a significant χ^2 value of 7.8516 with a p-value of .0491. These results thus fall in line with those presented in the paper, strengthening my conclusion that men and women in office respond to the experimental treatments differently. Finally, Table 8 then uses state level controls rather than state fixed effects, and once again produces no substantive changes from the results discussed above.

Table 6: OLS (State Fixed Effects) Model

	<i>Dependent variable: Legislator Response</i>	
	y1	
	(baseline Model)	(Model Interacting Treatment by Gender)
Mobilization Treatment	0.137** (0.055)	0.271*** (0.078)
Expertise Treatment	-0.050 (0.055)	0.008 (0.076)
Combined Treatment	0.061 (0.055)	0.151** (0.076)
Female	0.113*** (0.039)	0.265*** (0.078)
Female * Mobilization Treatment		-0.274** (0.110)
Female * Mobilization Treatment		-0.135 (0.111)
Female * Combined Treatment		-0.198* (0.111)
Constant	0.302*** (0.076)	0.236*** (0.081)
Observations	600	600
Residual Std. Error	0.474 (df = 588)	0.473 (df = 585)
F Statistic	5.717*** (df = 11; 588)	4.995*** (df = 14; 585)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 7: OLS (State Fixed Effects) Model with Legislator Controls

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	y1	
	(baseline Model)	(Model Interacting Treatment by Gender)
Mobilization Treatment	0.163*** (0.057)	0.299*** (0.080)
Expertise Treatment	-0.016 (0.057)	0.062 (0.078)
Combined Treatment	0.080 (0.056)	0.198** (0.077)
Female	0.110*** (0.040)	0.292*** (0.080)
Female * Mobilization Treatment		-0.284** (0.113)
Female * Expertise Treatment		-0.179 (0.113)
Female * Combined Treatment		-0.260** (0.113)
Democrat	-0.085** (0.042)	-0.089** (0.042)
Relevant Committee Membership	0.028 (0.047)	0.023 (0.047)
Lower Chamber	-0.035 (0.048)	-0.034 (0.048)
Constant	0.385*** (0.066)	0.310*** (0.073)
Observations	600	600
Residual Std. Error	0.487 (df = 591)	0.485 (df = 588)
F Statistic	3.325*** (df = 7; 591)	3.142*** (df = 10; 588)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 8: OLS Model with State and Legislator Controls

	<i>Dependent variable: Legislator Response</i>	
	y1	
	(baseline Model)	(Model Interacting Treatment by Gender)
Mobilization Treatment	0.163*** (0.056)	0.297*** (0.080)
Expertise Treatment	-0.015 (0.056)	0.060 (0.077)
Combined Treatment	0.079 (0.056)	0.191** (0.077)
Female	0.110*** (0.040)	0.286*** (0.080)
Female * Mobilization Treatment		-0.280** (0.113)
Female * Expertise Treatment		-0.174 (0.113)
Female * Combined Treatment		-0.248** (0.113)
Democrat	-0.099** (0.043)	-0.102** (0.043)
Relevant Committee Membership	0.035 (0.047)	0.029 (0.047)
Lower Chamber	-0.027 (0.049)	-0.027 (0.049)
Legislature Professionalism	0.015 (0.017)	0.014 (0.017)
Percent Women in Legislature	0.008 (0.005)	0.007 (0.005)
Constant	0.210 (0.135)	0.154 (0.137)
Observations	600	600
Residual Std. Error	0.486 (df = 590)	0.485 (df = 587)
F Statistic	3.208*** (df = 9; 590)	3.035*** (df = 12; 587)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

6.6 Gender Gaps and Partisanship in Experimental Results

Tables 9 and 10 evaluate partisan differences in treatment effects within male and female legislators observed independently. Table 9 interacts treatment group by legislator gender and Democratic party membership, while Table 10 interacts treatment group by legislator gender and Republican party membership. Both Tables 9 and 10 are presented below.

Looking at the results interacting female gender by treatment group by Democratic party member in Table 9, the coefficient estimated for Female refers to the difference between female Republicans vs. male Republicans in the control group. In other words, it speaks to the baseline gender differences within the Republican party. The difference is substantial, estimated at .260, and statistically significant with a p-value less than .05. The coefficient estimated for in Table 9 for Female * Democrats compares female legislators in the control group across party, and suggests that Democratic Females are not significantly more likely to respond to the control than Republican Female legislators.

The results estimated in Table 10 interacting female gender by treatment group by Republican party member are quite similar. The coefficient estimated for Female now refers to the difference between female Democrats and male Democrats, and is both statistically significant and substantively similar to the estimate for Female in Table 9. And similarly to regression results presented in Table 9, the interaction term Female * Republicans shows no significant difference between Republican and Democratic female legislators. Paying respect to the limitations of these analytic findings, these combined results do provide some evidence in support of the conclusion that partisan differences between women are not driving the trends exhibited in the broader experimental analyses.

What's more, the results presented in Tables 9 and 10 also lend credibility to the presumption that differences across gender can be traced back to intrinsic rather than political motivations for descriptive representatives. The experimental results show clear differences between men and women in office. However, the results cannot speak specifically to the mechanisms driving these differences. I have assumed that such gender gaps stem from intrinsic benefits offered by a women's issue group to a female legislator based on shared group identity. But scholars have also often suggested that linkages between descriptive and substantive representation arise from how legislators perceive the strength of electoral support offered by in-group constituencies. In his groundbreaking research on Congressional behavior, Fenno (1978) observes that members of Congress consider their districts in terms of a conglomeration of constituency groups. If a legislator perceives a great deal of electoral potential for a given constituency group, they are likely to allocate more time to address policy issues specific to that particular constituency, and vice versa; they are likely allies to that constituency group and their policy preferences.

Consensus that women do objectively constitute a "constituency group" as defined by Fenno (1978) is also fairly clear in the literature. The politics of gender guide how voters consider issues, parties, and candidates (Brians 2005; Dolan 1998; Schaffner 2005; Herrnson, Lay and Stokes 2003; Paolino 1995; Plutzer and Zipp 1996).

Table 9: Triple Interactions: Gender * Democrat * Treatment

<i>DV: Response to Women's Advocacy Organization</i>	
	Legislator Response
Mobilization Treatment	0.381*** (0.134)
Expertise Treatment	-0.046 (0.127)
Combined Treatment	0.233* (0.124)
Female	0.260** (0.132)
Democrat	-0.086 (0.107)
Female * Mobilization Treatment	-0.391** (0.192)
Female * Expertise Treatment	0.056 (0.188)
Female * Combined Treatment	-0.245 (0.184)
Female * Democrat	0.052 (0.166)
Democrat * Mobilization Treatment	-0.114 (0.167)
Democrat * Mobilization Treatment	0.172 (0.160)
Democrat * Combined Treatment	-0.058 (0.158)
Female * Democrat * Mobilization Treatment	0.148 (0.238)
Female * Democrat * Expertise Treatment	-0.367 (0.235)
Female * Democrat * Combined Treatment	-0.019 (0.233)
Observations	600
Residual Std. Error	0.485 (df = 584)
F Statistic	2.597*** (df = 15; 584)
<i>Note:</i>	
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table 10: Triple Interactions: Gender * Republican * Treatment

	<i>DV: Response to Women's Advocacy Organization</i>
	Legislator Response
Mobilization Treatment	0.252*** (0.097)
Expertise Treatment	0.068 (0.096)
Combined Treatment	0.136 (0.097)
Female	0.291*** (0.099)
Republican	0.069 (0.107)
Female * Mobilization Treatment	-0.242* (0.136)
Female * Expertise Treatment	-0.283** (0.137)
Female * Combined Treatment	-0.220 (0.141)
Female * Republican	-0.061 (0.162)
Republican * Mobilization Treatment	0.079 (0.163)
Republican * Expertise Treatment	-0.162 (0.158)
Republican * Combined Treatment	0.052 (0.156)
Female * Republican * Mobilization Treatment	-0.117 (0.232)
Female * Republican * Expertise Treatment	0.406* (0.230)
Female * Republican * Combined Treatment	0.045 (0.230)
Observations	600
Residual Std. Error	0.472 (df = 577)
F Statistic	3.600*** (df = 22; 577)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Despite being descriptively underrepresented in politics (CAWP 2015), women make up over half the voting electorate and are considered significant for understanding campaign dynamics (Schaffner 2005). Furthermore, studies show that women use their identity in deciding how to vote (Brains 2005; Dolan 1998; Paolino 1995; Plutzer and Zipp 1996).

Evidence also suggests that legislators themselves see women as a potential “constituency group,” estimating their electoral support and taking action in part based on their beliefs about what women as a voting group can offer electorally. Democratic and Republican candidates alike take significant steps in campaign outreach to women voters specifically by utilizing identity-based appeals (Abdullah 2012; Anderson, Lewis, and Baird 2011; Casserly 2012; Schaffner 2005). Reingold (2000), in her study of *Women as a Constituency Group*, considers which legislators *in particular* view female constituents this way. By exploring how individual legislators perceive the electoral potential of their female constituents as a distinct constituency group, Reingold reveals who is more or less predisposed to taking action on women-specific policy concerns. She clarifies, “one does not necessarily have to perceive women as a particularly supportive constituency group to take action on their behalf, but such support certainly would provide an incentive for doing so” (2000, 114). Using interview-based evidence collected in the California and Arizona state legislatures, Reingold (2000) finds that female legislators rated women as their most supportive constituency group, where as male legislators did not. In fact, among male California legislators, women were rated as one of the *least* supportive constituency groups. Notably, districts represented by male verses female legislators were similar with respect to constituent ideology and partisanship; “the relatively strong support these female lawmakers felt they received from women cannot be ‘explained away’ as a coincidental reflection of district peculiarities” (2000, 119).

There thus exists a puzzling question as to what drives differences between the observed legislative activity of men and women. Identifying if a legislator’s motivation is intrinsic or political is an important question because a legislator is often presented with opportunities to take action on behalf of groups which must remain unobserved; if politically rather than intrinsically motivated, a legislator is unlikely to work for positive change for a group where there is no potential for electoral gains. Intrinsic motivations give hope that politicians will do the right thing even when nobody is watching. Furthermore, women as a marginalized group are far from homogeneous, and some subgroups within the female population- especially those facing intersectional marginalization- might not constitute large constituencies for female legislators in power. Again, if politically rather than intrinsically motivated, a female legislator is unlikely to take strong legislative action on a women’s policy primarily targeting marginalized female populations outside their direct constituencies. On the other hand, intrinsic motivations for women’s substantive representation would more optimistically predict pro-women’s legislative activism in the same scenario. Nevertheless, this central question is as difficult to answer as it is important to answer; as Broockman (2013, 533) states well, “the role of such intrinsic motivation is challenging to empirically explore

because politicians have incentives to appear intrinsically motivated even if they are not.”

Ultimately, there are two potential stories at play, both of which would shed light on the gender gaps as well as the ceiling effect emerging in my central findings:

1. Men and women are motivated to respond to a women’s advocacy organization based on a gender group affinity (intrinsic benefits). Women are likely to feel that affinity, leading to a higher likelihood they will respond to the women’s group in their simple meeting request and also leading to the ceiling effect of added lobbying tactics. In contrast, men do not feel that affinity, and thus the additional political motivation of added lobbying tactics leads them to be more responsive.
2. Men and women are both politically motivated in the decision to respond to a women’s advocacy organization. However, female legislators see women as a key electoral constituency more so than men, and are thus more likely to respond to the basic meeting request. This leads to the ceiling effect for women, where added lobbying efforts and political mobilization are unlikely to see substantial visible effect on women in office.

Partisanship offers an interesting opportunity to disentangle these stories. If electoral rather than intrinsic motivations do better to explain the gender gaps in my findings, we would expect Democratic women to be more likely to respond to the women’s organization than Republican women. Based on the analysis presented in Table 9, this is not the case. While I cannot make any firm conclusions based on these limited findings, it is noteworthy that the reported trends align well with my underlying theoretic framework, pointing towards intrinsic rather than political mechanisms for the links between descriptive and substantive representation.

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