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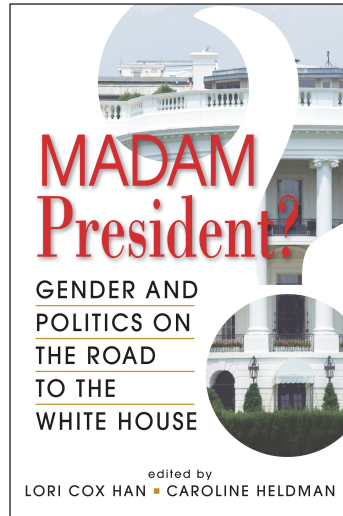
Madam President? Gender and Politics on the Road to the White House

edited by
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Contents

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 Electing Madam President <i>Lori Cox Han</i>	1
2 Comparing the Years of the Woman, 1992 and 2018 <i>Anne Pluta and Misty Knight-Finley</i>	19
3 Money and Candidate Viability <i>Victoria A. Farrar-Myers</i>	45
4 Masculinity and Media Coverage on the Campaign Trail <i>Meredith Conroy</i>	59
5 Electing a Woman President in the #MeToo Era <i>Caroline Heldman</i>	75
6 Women, the Presidency, and Popular Culture <i>Linda Beail and Lilly J. Goren</i>	97
7 The Public's Perception of Candidates' Spouses <i>Brian Frederick, Laurel Elder, and Barbara Burrell</i>	123
8 Sex, Gender, and Leadership in the Executive Branch <i>Karen M. Hult</i>	141

viii *Contents*

9	Gender and Leadership Challenges in National Security <i>Meena Bose</i>	167
10	Confronting Barriers on the Road to Madam President <i>Caroline Heldman and Lori Cox Han</i>	193
	<i>Bibliography</i>	201
	<i>The Contributors</i>	213
	<i>Index</i>	217
	<i>About the Book</i>	227

1

Electing Madam President

Lori Cox Han

FOR YEARS, POLITICAL PUNDITS HAVE SPECULATED ABOUT when the United States would elect its first woman president. Even though twelve women have made serious bids for the presidency in the past 130 years, most predictions and analysis have focused on just one woman—Hillary Clinton. She has now run for president twice, losing the Democratic nomination to Barack Obama in 2008 and the presidency to Donald Trump in 2016. While there is no simple explanation for why Clinton lost in 2016, gender most likely played a role, which provides many lessons for future women candidates now that a major political party has nominated a woman for president. In addition, the outcome of the 2016 presidential election has influenced the current political environment in significant ways regarding issues relevant to women (the #MeToo Movement, the Women’s March, etc.), as well as promoted many women candidates in both parties and at all levels of government. Proof of that trend can be found in the outcome of the 2018 midterm elections, which saw record-breaking numbers of women running for and winning political office at both the national and state level. At the start of 2019, there were more women than ever before serving in Congress, with 25 in the Senate and 102 in the House of Representatives (and Nancy Pelosi returning to the position of Speaker of the House with Democratic control of the chamber).¹ Looking ahead to future presidential campaigns, will one or both of the next two presidential campaigns move the idea of electing a woman as president beyond a talking point and into reality?

Both the 2020 and 2024 presidential elections promise to be groundbreaking, with more women candidates than ever before seeking the White House. For 2020, the prospective Democratic field of challengers ready to take on Trump, assuming he is the Republican nominee, included several women. US senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts became the first to announce an exploratory committee on December 31, 2017, nearly two years before Election Day (she would officially announce her campaign less than two months later). Within days, US representative Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii announced that she would run for president, followed by US senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, US senator Kamala Harris of California, and US senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota. In addition, author, lecturer, and activist Marianne Williamson announced her candidacy for the Democratic nomination in November 2018. Other potential candidates included 2018 Georgia gubernatorial nominee Stacey Abrams, along with a few celebrity candidates like Oprah Winfrey and Angelina Jolie. And let's not forget 2016 presidential nominee, Hillary Clinton, who said in an October 2018 interview when asked if she wants to run again, "No. . . . Well, I'd like to be president," continuing to fuel speculation that she has not ruled out the possibility of running for president a third time.²

On the Republican side, with Trump as the presumed nominee for a second term, more speculation is being given to potential Republican women candidates in 2024. Former United Nations ambassador and South Carolina governor Nikki Haley is at the top of the list. When Haley announced she was stepping down from her post at the UN in October 2018, speculation in the news media began immediately that Haley was planning a presidential run in 2020. While not specifying her future plans, Haley responded that she would be campaigning for Trump in 2020. A *Washington Post* columnist pointed out that Haley, at 46, was the same age as George H. W. Bush when he left the position of UN ambassador, and he was the only person to ever hold the post and then be elected president.³ Haley is also considered a potential candidate for US Senate in South Carolina, or a possible running mate to Trump in 2020 should he decide to replace Vice President Mike Pence on the Republican ticket.⁴ Other Republican women who are potential candidates for future presidential and/or vice presidential runs include US Senator Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee (elected in 2018 after serving sixteen years in the House), US Senator Joni Ernst of Iowa, and Governor Kim Reynolds of Iowa.

For those ready to see a woman elected president, the good news is that the United States is seeing the largest ever field of declared and potential women candidates for president in the next two campaign cycles. That so many women are running, considering running, or have the news media speculating that they might run, suggests that women presidential candidates are not the anomaly they used to be. The 2020 Democratic primary alone has made the idea of female presidential candidates the new normal; the six women running also bring diversity in terms of ideology by ranging from moderate to progressive within the Democratic Party, representing different regions of the country, and bringing varied professional and life experiences to their campaigns.

It was not that long ago when any woman even thinking about running for president would automatically be labeled a political oddity, as when US representative Patricia Schroeder (D-CO) publicly considered a run in 1988 until announcing otherwise. More than a decade would pass until any other women presidential candidates would emerge. However, the campaigns of both Elizabeth Dole (former cabinet member in the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations) in 2000 and Carol Moseley Braun (former US senator from Illinois) in 2004 would not make it past the prenomination period, with both ending their campaigns before any voting took place. In 2008, Clinton would continue the trend of just one woman entering the race for the White House, despite intense media speculation in 2005–2006 that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would seek the Republican Party nomination.⁵ Clinton would become the first woman candidate to win a presidential primary contest (after winning the 2008 New Hampshire primary, she would go on to win 21 other state contests), though she would lose the Democratic nomination in a closely contested battle to Obama. US representative Michele Bachmann (R-MN) was the only woman to run in 2012 but dropped out of the race after finishing sixth in the Iowa caucuses.

The 2016 presidential campaign made history when Democrats selected Clinton as the first woman nominated for president from a major party. In addition, that year, for the first time, a woman ran for president for both the Democratic and Republican parties. Former Hewlett-Packard chief executive officer (CEO) Carly Fiorina was the only woman in the crowded Republican field, focusing on her corporate experience and the need to put a non-career politician in the White House. However, Fiorina would end her campaign in February 2016, after failing to earn significant voter support in the early contests of Iowa and New Hampshire.

Despite the progress made by these women and many others in seeking political office, the United States still lags behind several other countries, some with much more conservative political cultures, in electing women to executive leadership positions. Although no other national system of government matches the constitutional uniqueness found within the US system of government, several other countries have nevertheless had female prime ministers and presidents. In addition, as of 2018, the United States ranked 103rd globally in the number of women who hold seats in a national legislature or parliament.⁶ Much progress is still needed in electing women at all levels of government in the United States, as well as in expanding the field of presidential contenders to include numerous women in both parties and from all ideological perspectives. While the office of the presidency is unique in both constitutional design and institutional structure, understanding the role that gender has played within the broader context of women running for and winning political office at all levels of government is instructive when looking ahead to the 2020 and 2024 election cycles. Those issues worth exploring to determine the viability of finally electing “madam president” include Clinton’s legacy as a presidential candidate; whether the current political environment changes the conventional wisdom about barriers that may exist for women presidential candidates; and why the lack of women vice-presidential candidates, as well as the number of women governors, matters.

Hillary Clinton: Lessons and Legacies

Heading into Election Day 2016, nearly every poll, pundit, and political expert predicted an easy victory for Clinton against Trump. Had those predictions been accurate, her presidency would have been historic. Following Obama’s election in 2008, it would have marked two presidencies in a row that shattered the long-held tradition of only white men occupying the White House. The symbolism of Clinton as the first woman president would have resonated worldwide as a national mark of progress for American women in all walks of life. However, that narrative was destroyed when, despite losing the popular vote to Clinton by 3 million, Trump won the electoral college by a margin of 304 to 227.⁷

Despite the name recognition and fundraising advantages that Clinton enjoyed, many experts overlooked flaws in the Clinton campaign strategy and did not fully comprehend the antiestablishment mood

among the electorate in 2016 that allowed an outsider like Trump to win both the Republican nomination and eventually the presidency. Additionally, she faced substantial sexism from news media, Trump, Trump surrogates, and voters across the political spectrum as the first woman in the general election contest. Furthermore, the long-running narrative in news media coverage that Clinton would become the first woman president, dating back to Bill Clinton's presidency, may have hindered both of her presidential campaigns more than it helped. Her election to the US Senate in 2000, the last year of her husband's administration, was framed as a stepping-stone to the White House. When Clinton passed up the opportunity to run in 2004 and challenge incumbent president George W. Bush, she became the immediate Democratic front-runner for 2008. The inevitability of Clinton becoming the first woman president only began to seriously erode once Obama won an upset victory in the Iowa caucuses in January 2008. After Super Tuesday in February 2008, Obama's momentum continued to build as he consistently won more state contests, and ultimately delegates, than Clinton did. She finally conceded the race in June 2008, declared that fall while campaigning for Obama that she would not run for president again, and served as secretary of state during Obama's first term.

Clinton declared her second campaign for the White House in April 2015, starting as the clear front-runner and presumptive Democratic nominee. That stood in stark contrast to the Republican nomination battle, with an initial field of seventeen candidates that some predicted would last until the party's convention. Instead, the strong antiestablishment mood in the country helped Trump, a real estate mogul and reality television star with no political experience, to wrap up the Republican nomination in early May, while Clinton struggled to fend off the surprisingly strong challenge from US senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont. Clinton finally secured the Democratic nomination following a win in the California primary in June, but Sanders won a total of 22 primary and caucus contests, won 1,879 delegates (of the 4,765 available), and raised a total of \$222 million. The 2016 campaign had moments of déjà vu for Clinton as challenges—both real and potential—threatened to alter her inevitability narrative. Clinton faced scrutiny, as well as an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), over her use of a private e-mail server while secretary of state (2009–2013), and other news stories focused on potential conflicts of interest involving contributions to the Clinton Global Initiative and speaking fees that both she and Bill Clinton received. Despite her long résumé of public

service, Clinton struggled in the categories of honesty and trustworthiness in public opinion polls.⁸ Even the narrative of becoming the first woman president didn't seem to work for her campaign; in May 2016, campaign research conducted by EMILY's List found that the Clinton campaign should "de-emphasize the 'first' talk" with voters and donors since "they already know she'd be the first woman president, but we don't get anything by reminding them." The potential to make history did not resonate with younger women, who throughout the Democratic primaries overwhelmingly supported Sanders and his more progressive agenda over Clinton.⁹

During the general election, and particularly the three presidential debates, personal and political attacks dominated the contest between Clinton and Trump. For months, Trump had referred to Clinton as "Crooked Hillary," and his supporters would chant "lock her up" and "Trump That Bitch" at each of his public rallies.¹⁰ Clinton had a headline-grabbing moment that also contributed to the divisiveness when she stated the following at a fundraising event: "You know, just to be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. They're racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamaphobic—you name it."¹¹ The strong antiestablishment mood among the electorate, along with miscalculations by the Clinton campaign in messaging and tactics (including her lack of attention to so-called rust belt states like Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania that her campaign took for granted would remain in the Democratic column), contributed to the Trump victory.

There has long been an assumption that "a viable woman presidential candidate (that is, a candidate who could legitimately compete in primaries and caucuses and have a real chance at her party's nomination) would help to further break down barriers for woman candidates at all levels of government."¹² While Clinton was certainly the most viable woman presidential candidate to date, she and her campaign also had many inherent flaws, among them strategic missteps as well as the personal and political baggage she brought to her campaign. Recent research suggests that while women are no longer considered token candidates, they still benefit from their outsider status among voters, who tend to view candidates who are newer to the political process as more trustworthy and capable of bringing change to the political system. In a strong antiestablishment political environment like 2016, Clinton's long government résumé worked against her; her claims that she was the real anti-establishment candidate because of her gender rang hollow with many

voters. Women candidates can be judged more harshly as “politicians” as opposed to “women,” and while to be judged as a “leader” and not as a “lady” may not always be positive, it shows that in this category, women and men are judged by similar standards.¹³

In the inevitable postmortem of the 2016 campaign, numerous flaws in Clinton’s strategy became obvious to those analyzing how she could have lost to Trump. Perhaps one of the most revelatory assessments came from journalists Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes, whose 2017 book *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton’s Doomed Campaign* relied on insider access throughout 2015–2016 to show how the public narrative of the inevitability of a Clinton victory stood in stark contrast to the actual day-to-day workings of the campaign. Referring to the campaign as “spirit-crushing” to staffers who struggled with the numerous strategic missteps, several key points emerged to explain why Clinton lost, including infighting among campaign staff, misallocation of campaign resources, overly optimistic reliance on voting data, and a lack of a coherent vision for why she was running. This failure to address some of the same missteps that had occurred in 2008 would haunt her second run for the White House, in part because of her own inherent flaws as a presidential candidate: “And yet what Hillary couldn’t quite see is that no matter how she recast the supporting roles in this production, or emphasized different parts of the script, the main character hadn’t changed.”¹⁴ In her own book, *What Happened*, Clinton argued that sexism and several other factors played a role, such as “the audacious information warfare waged from the Kremlin, the unprecedented intervention in our election by the director of the FBI, a political press that told voters that my emails were the most important story, and deep currents of anger and resentment flowing through our culture.”¹⁵

Regardless of why she lost, and despite the bitter disappointment of many of her supporters, Clinton’s nomination marked an important milestone in moving closer to electing a woman president and in helping to shape the political environment in upcoming presidential campaigns.

The Political Environment: Conventional Wisdom vs. Reality

As the discussion has evolved during the past three decades, conventional wisdom often suggests that women presidential candidates still face an uphill battle. The presumed barriers include the inherent masculinity of

the office of the presidency, prevalent negative stereotypes of women leaders, gender bias in news coverage of woman politicians, and a lack of potential women candidates due to so few women holding political positions.¹⁶ Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, the conventional wisdom on this topic often comes from media talking points and opinion writers as opposed to a substantive understanding of the constitutional and institutional factors that shape presidential campaigns. Gender may be an important factor in assessing the viability of a woman presidential candidate, but it is not the only one. While being a woman running for president may require a unique strategy in fundraising, messaging, and creating a narrative that presents a strong leader capable of handling the job of president, these strategic areas “are not permanent structural barriers that stop a woman from winning the White House.”¹⁷ Several factors, both permanent and fluid, shape the political environment of each presidential campaign. Let’s consider the factors that might be significant in the next two campaign cycles.

First, it is always important to begin with the constitutional requirements for the office of the presidency—being at least 35 years old, a 14-year US resident, and a natural-born citizen. No other formal criteria exist to run for president, but several informal qualifications have always limited the pool of potential nominees. Until Obama’s success in 2008, all presidential candidates from the two major parties had been white, male, and almost exclusively Protestant.¹⁸ The health and age of the candidate, as well as family ties and personal relationships (particularly marital status and fidelity) have generally been important characteristics for candidates.¹⁹ The notion of “leadership,” which is often defined on male terms, is also considered. Through the traditional interpretation of our national history, a male-dominated view of leadership has been indoctrinated into the consciousness of most Americans, which in turn, affects how voters might view aspiring women leaders; this can leave women with a “double standard and a double bind” as men are still more readily accepted as leaders than women.²⁰

Gender stereotypes also matter and can influence how women candidates and their campaigns are covered in the news media. Potential women presidential and vice-presidential candidates have not always been portrayed as authoritative or as strong leaders in the press, and early research on this topic found that women candidates were indeed hurt by negative stereotypes and/or being portrayed as merely an anomaly. For example, Elizabeth Dole’s coverage in 1999 “was covered more as a novelty than a serious candidate,” what the White House Project

referred to as the “hair, hemlines, and husbands” approach to coverage.²¹ Other studies showed this trend of gender bias, making gender a significant, and not always positive, label in news media coverage for women candidates.²² More recent studies have shown that presidential elections are “gendered” spaces that focus on masculinity, toughness, and “presidential timber.” While the candidacies of Clinton in 2008, Bachmann in 2012, and both Clinton and Fiorina in 2016 helped shift the definition of masculinity, more progress is needed to “regender” presidential campaigns to gain acceptance for a variety of leadership styles that do not evoke hypermasculinity.²³

Since 2008, news media emphasis on a candidate’s sex, appearance, marital status, and masculine issues “still haunts female candidates,” and new media (online and social media sites) has included some of the most offensive and sexist coverage, as the “online universe of political commentary operates outside of traditional media editorial boundaries and is sometimes incisive but often offensive and unsubstantiated.”²⁴ Although Clinton’s presidential campaigns are the best case studies to determine the effect of gender stereotypes on news coverage, they are also problematic given her front-runner status in the prenomination and early primary stages in 2008 and throughout 2016, as front-runners tend to get more coverage, including more negative coverage, than less viable candidates. In 2008, Clinton’s campaign was “not a simple story of media bias or sexism” as it presented three interlocking factors: the role of gender in presidential politics, contemporary media norms and routines, and the individual candidate and her particular political context. Clinton had “unique assets and liabilities”; she was the most viable woman presidential candidate in US history, but she was also “a *particular* female candidate with a particular political history who faced a particular political context. . . . Clinton’s challenges were not just those faced by women politicians in general, but very specific to Clinton’s own personal and political history.”²⁵ These factors were certainly at play throughout the 2016 campaign as well. While it is still too early to have reliable empirical data to show how media coverage or gender stereotypes may have influenced the outcome of the 2018 midterm elections, we do know that the number of women running and winning in that campaign cycle shifted the narrative for women candidates in a more positive way than perhaps ever before.

Relatedly, public opinion in recent years suggests support for electing a woman president, at least in theory.²⁶ However, in the two years following 9/11, support for electing a woman president in polling had

declined, suggesting that women face tougher public scrutiny during times of war.²⁷ In addition, while public opinion polls consistently show support for a qualified female presidential candidate, there is evidence to suggest that responses to this polling question may suffer from “social desirability effects”—that is, respondents may be purposely giving false answers to avoid violating societal norms.²⁸ Research has also shown that the gender, education, and political ideology of the respondents in polls about electing a woman president seem to be the most prominent factors that shape public opinion, followed by age, race, and party identification.²⁹

It is important to bear in mind that polling results in the last few years have not been consistently reliable, especially regarding Clinton’s chances of winning the presidency in 2016. Nearly every pollster and political pundit predicted a Clinton victory, with the odds ranging from 70 to 99 percent on Election Day. Several factors contributed to this, including nonresponse bias (pollsters find certain voters, like those who have more negative views of government and the political establishment, harder to reach); the number of respondents who were “shy-Trumpers” (voters who were not comfortable admitting their support for Trump); and methodological flaws in modeling to determine likely voters (many models were based on the 2012 electorate, which did not accurately represent 2016).³⁰ Then again, Clinton never consistently fared well with favorability ratings in public opinion polls in her time as First Lady, US senator, secretary of state, and presidential candidate. An analysis of polls show that Clinton is perceived most favorably in a nonpolitical context; her highest rating of 66 percent favorability came during Bill Clinton’s scandals in 1998 and in 2013 when she ended her tenure as secretary of state and had yet to reenter the political arena.³¹ Given that no future woman presidential candidate will model Clinton’s political and personal experiences (both good and bad) on the global stage, this does not suggest that a gender-specific barrier exists for women candidates regarding polling and public approval.

The “woman as president” theme has also continued to appear with regularity within pop culture, which supports the changing narrative of women seeking higher elective office. For example, in the buildup to Clinton’s first campaign in 2008, the ABC show *Commander in Chief* introduced the American television audience to President Mackenzie Allen, an Independent vice president to a Republican president who dies in office. Portrayed by Oscar-winner Geena Davis,

President Allen faces many domestic and international crises during her accidental presidency, all the while juggling the demands of a husband, three children, and a widowed mother who all live together in the White House. However, despite the media hype, early high ratings, and Davis's Emmy nomination and Golden Globe win for Best Actress in a Drama Series in 2006, the show was canceled after just one season due to low ratings. Since then, American movie and television viewers have seen many diverse portrayals of women as president, vice president, secretary of state, and numerous other executive branch positions. This trend is important in that "Hollywood decided to elect minorities and women to the presidency some time before reality moved in that direction."³² The significance is that even though these characters are fictional, they can function "as a propositional argument that women can serve as chief executives equal to men and that, to the extent that sexism endures in US society, it is recognized as anachronistic, ridiculous, or corrupt."³³ The portrayal of women in all types of political leadership positions, even if fictional, helps one to imagine that it is possible.³⁴

At present, there are several popular and award-winning shows that prominently feature women in high-ranking executive political positions. While some of the plot lines are more realistic than others, the diversity of the characters themselves along with the specific genre of entertainment bodes well for broadening the diversity of views among Americans when it comes to women leaders. For example, in its sixth and final season in the fall of 2019, the CBS drama *Madam Secretary* shows Secretary of State Elizabeth McCord, portrayed by Téa Leoni, making the decision to run for president. On Showtime's spy thriller *Homeland*, in its sixth season in the spring of 2017, US Senator Elizabeth Keane of New York is elected president. And on HBO's political satire *Veep*, Julia Louis-Dreyfus portrays Selina Meyer, a former US senator from Maryland who becomes vice president and ultimately succeeds to the presidency when the current president resigns. The show, which debuted in 2012 and ended a seven-season run in 2019, was critically acclaimed from the start. *Veep* has won numerous awards, including an Emmy for outstanding comedy series for its fourth, fifth, and sixth seasons, and through 2017, Louis-Dreyfus had won six consecutive Emmys for best actress. Two other successful and recent television dramas that have featured women as president include ABC's *Scandal* and Netflix's *House of Cards*. The characters of Mellie Grant on *Scandal* and Claire Underwood on *House of Cards* both become president immediately following their

husband's tenure in the White House, and while each character certainly had flaws that might impede their political success in a real-life setting, they, along with the other recent portrayals of women in political power, nonetheless continue to move the public's perception of a woman president away from a mere oddity or anomaly.

The Running Mate Drought

Electing the first woman vice president would also break a significant political barrier. To date, 14 vice presidents have gone on to become president, either through succession (following the death or resignation of the president) or election in their own right. Since Geraldine Ferraro's historic bid for the vice presidency as Democrat Walter Mondale's running mate in 1984, only one other woman has been nominated for vice president—Alaska governor Sarah Palin in 2008.

Following Ferraro's candidacy, public anticipation for the second female running mate remained high. Why did it take another 24 years before another major party nominated a woman for vice president, and why have the Democrats not done so a second time?

Perhaps most importantly, despite all the progress made in women gaining elective office during the past three decades, few women have achieved the types of positions that would place them in the pool of potential presidential or even vice-presidential candidates. Thus, the most tangible problem when considering the prospects of electing a woman president is simply that so few women are in the "on-deck circle"—a short list of presidential candidates, put together in part by the news media through speculation as well as the behavior and travel patterns of notable politicians (for example, who is traveling to Iowa and New Hampshire, or speaking at high-profile party events, in the months leading up to the first nomination contests). This on-deck circle exists of roughly thirty to forty individuals in any given presidential election year, and can include governors, prominent US senators, a few members of the House of Representatives, and a handful of recent governors or vice presidents who have remained prominent in the news media.³⁵ These "lists" are now generated prior to the completion of the presidential election at hand as political pundits want to start handicapping future presidential races.

This presents an interesting quandary for women seeking the White House; few women have served as state governors or in the other posi-

tions that would make them viable as potential candidates. In addition, four of the last seven presidents served as a state governor (Jimmy Carter of Georgia, Ronald Reagan of California, Bill Clinton of Arkansas, and George W. Bush of Texas), and two were considered outsiders (Barack Obama, who had only been US senator from Illinois for two years prior to launching his presidential campaign, and Donald Trump, who had no prior political, or even military, experience). Only one recent president (George H. W. Bush) was a political insider, having served as Reagan's vice president for eight years. Also, while women are often traditionally considered outsiders, the masculinity inherent in the office of the presidency works against them when compared to an excellent campaigner like Obama or a bombastic CEO and reality television star like Trump. That is not to say, however, that a woman candidate with as little political experience as Obama or no political experience as Trump could not similarly benefit from the uniqueness of the political environment and succeed as Obama and Trump did in 2008 and 2016, respectively. Much can be determined by the uniqueness of the political environment, as witnessed in 2016 regarding a strong antiestablishment mood among the electorate as well as a high level of fear and/or resentment over the shifting political order, likely inspired by eight years of a black president who threatened the traditional social order.

The fact remains, however, that women candidates do not often find their way into the quadrennial group of potential presidential candidates. No woman has ever served as vice president, and in Congress, no woman had ever held a top leadership position until Nancy Pelosi became the House Democratic Minority Leader in 2003; the final leadership barrier was broken in the House of Representatives when Pelosi became Speaker of the House in January 2007 and returned to the position in January 2019. However, as of 2019, she remains the only woman to hold a top congressional leadership position. Given the recent preference among American voters for executive leadership experience at the state level, women have been especially disadvantaged. As of 2019, only 44 women have ever served as governor (and three succeeded their husbands in the job), and while being governor of a large state is one of the most likely stepping stones to being considered a viable candidate for the White House, only one of the six largest electoral states (California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and Pennsylvania) has ever elected a woman as governor (Democrat Ann Richards served one term as Texas governor, elected in 1990; Miriam Amanda "Ma" Ferguson, a

Democrat, served as governor from 1925–1927 and 1933–1935, replacing her husband, who was impeached).³⁶

While serving as a state governor is certainly not the only path to the White House, the dearth of women who have executive experience—either in politics or business—leaves fewer women on the presidential short list. In addition, while the women currently serving in the US Senate enjoy high profiles in American politics, the Senate is traditionally not the place to look for a presidential candidate. Obama became the first president elected directly from the Senate since John F. Kennedy’s election in 1960, and only the third in US history (the other being Warren Harding, elected in 1920). The lack of women leaders in Congress also tends to keep women off the presidential short list. In addition, recent research has shown that the candidate emergence phase of a campaign—moving from a potential to an actual candidate—represents one of the biggest hurdles for women to overcome, particularly in seeking the presidency. A gender gap seems to exist in political ambition, which is attributed to the fact that women are significantly less likely than men to receive encouragement (either from a current or former politician or from a financial supporter) to run for office or to deem themselves qualified to run for office.³⁷

Plan of the Book

As it has been for some time, electing a woman president remains both a timely and important topic. In this volume, we bring a scholarly perspective, based on our training as political scientists, to this much talked about and critical question. Even though more scholarship has emerged in recent years on this topic, much of the popular commentary about electing a woman president still lacks substantive analysis beyond public opinion polls or cable news talking points. However, the “post–Hillary Clinton era” offers the perfect opportunity to reassess what we know about women as presidential candidates and to analyze the potential success for women running for the White House in the next two presidential election cycles. This is particularly relevant for the Democratic Party in 2020 with several women seeking the nomination, which is creating a watershed moment for women in politics. An important question that has already emerged is whether women candidates can build on the momentum of Clinton’s historic campaign in 2016, or does her loss suggest that major barriers for women candidates have yet to be

broken? In other words, did Clinton lose because of her gender, because she was Hillary Clinton running against Donald Trump, or both?³⁸ In addition, how does the uniqueness of the presidential election process, as well as the office of the presidency itself, contribute to the challenges that women candidates may face?

To address these issues, the chapters that follow provide a scholarly assessment of the political environment in 2020 and beyond and how those factors will either benefit or inhibit women presidential candidates. The first section of the book considers the context of gender on the campaign trail by looking at key institutional factors, including political parties, campaign finance, and the news media. Presidential selection is a “complex and chaotic process” that has a “dramatic effect not only on the election outcome but also on setting the stage for the president’s future governing prospects.”³⁹ As such, how gender may or may not contribute to that process is essential in assessing a woman candidate’s viability. In Chapter 2, Anne Pluta and Misty Knight-Finley analyze the demographic characteristics of the women in the 103rd and 116th congresses, comparing levels of education, prior work and political experience, and age. These characteristics help explain the role of political parties in building a pipeline for women in politics. In Chapter 3, Victoria Farrar-Myers assesses the state of fundraising for women candidates seeking the presidency based on recent fundraising data from women congressional candidates. Both chapters show the importance of congressional elections in creating a pathway for women presidential candidates by assessing the similarities and differences of the electoral process at each level. In Chapter 4, Meredith Conroy reviews gender conflict framing in both rhetoric and media coverage during presidential campaigns, which pits candidates’ gender differences against one another. This means that while feminine traits like willingness to compromise and compassion are positive qualities, when media coverage disparages femininity in politics, women candidates can be at a disadvantage.

The next two chapters move beyond institutional aspects of the electoral process to explore the social aspects of gender and how that impacts women politicians seeking the presidency. Various factors, including media trends (both legacy and social media), public policy discussions, and popular culture, to name a few, join together to create the political environment that politicians at all levels of government must navigate. Media and popular culture in particular set the stage for the formation of social perceptions and priorities, which reveals much about how Americans value and assess gender within our culture.⁴⁰

In Chapter 5, Caroline Heldman considers how the issues of sexism and sexual violence shaped the 2016 presidential election and analyzes how that might influence the 2020 election, given the prominence of the #MeToo movement and other social justice campaigns based on issues of gender equity. In Chapter 6, Linda Beail and Lilly Goren provide an analysis of the changing portrayals of women political leaders in popular culture and explain how voters often access and integrate storytelling narratives within popular entertainment when making choices at the ballot box. The political environment is constructed, in part, through a media-driven reality, and understanding fictionalized portrayals of women as powerful political leaders can help explain the power of political socialization in how voters view women presidential candidates.

In the latter chapters, institutional aspects of governing are considered. Once elected, a president faces unique challenges from both the constitutional and institutional features of the office and must contend with various domestic and foreign policy matters, as well as managing the many executive branch agencies and the federal bureaucracy. No other job, either within politics, the business world, or the military, can prepare a president for the day-to-day responsibilities of serving as the chief executive and commander in chief. Chapter 7 provides a unique bridge from the previous chapters on social expectations about gender to help explain the importance of the first spouse as a political actor, albeit unofficial, within the White House. Brian Frederick, Laurel Elder, and Barbara Burrell analyze the evolving view of presidential candidate spouses and consider the public's expectations and possible reactions to the spouses of future women candidates as well as the possibility of having a first gentleman or first partner as opposed to a first lady. In Chapter 8, Karen Hult addresses the status of women as executive branch leaders at all levels of government, and how that shapes the potential pool of presidential candidates in both positive and negative ways. Despite the perceived importance of executive leadership experience, however, the six women competing in the Democratic primaries in the early months of 2019 had little to no executive political experience (five are members of Congress and one is an author). In Chapter 9, Meena Bose examines the challenges and opportunities for women presidential candidates in the twenty-first century, focusing in particular on the demands created in the post-9/11 era for protecting US national security and combating terrorism. She offers case studies of Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Carly Fiorina regarding this issue and how it affected their national campaigns.

Finally, Chapter 10 provides a brief assessment of the current political environment as it is unfolding during these early months of the 2020 presidential campaign, and what that means for the possibility of electing a woman president in this, or the next, presidential campaign cycle.

Notes

1. "Women in Elective Office 2019," Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/women-elective-office-2019>.

2. William Cummings, "Hillary Clinton Says She Doesn't Want to Run Again, But Would Still 'Like to Be President,'" *USA Today*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/10/29/hillary-clinton-recode-interview/1807270002>.

3. James Hohmann, "The Daily 202: Following in Bush 41's Footsteps? Five Takeaways from Nikki Haley's Departure as U.S. Ambassador," *Washington Post*, October 10, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2018/10/10/daily-202-following-in-bush-41-s-footsteps-five-takeaways-from-nikki-haley-s-departure-as-u-n-ambassador/5bbcedbe1b326b7c8a8d18e0/?utm_term=.bfl26642083f.

4. Greg Price, "Nikki Haley to Replace Mike Pence? Donald Trump Never Forgave Vice President for Criticizing 'Access Hollywood' Tape, Report Says," *Newsweek*, November 16, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/nikki-haley-replace-mike-pence-donald-trump-never-forgave-vice-president-1219909>.

5. Han, "Is the United States Really Ready for a Woman President?" in *Rethinking Madam President*, 9–11.

6. "Women in National Parliaments," Inter-Parliamentary Union, November 1, 2018, <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

7. Seven faithless electors voted for other candidates—two in Texas who did not vote for Trump, and four in Washington and one in Hawaii that did not vote for Clinton.

8. Han and Heldman, *Women, Power, and Politics*, 160–161.

9. Charlotte Hays, "Advice Given to Hillary: De-Emphasize the 'First' Talk," *Independent Women's Forum*, May 24, 2016, available at <http://iwf.org/blog/2800304/Advice-Given-to-Hillary:-De-emphasize-the-%22First%22-Talk>.

10. Han, "Donald J. Trump," in *Hatred of America's Presidents*, 374.

11. Amy Chozick, "Hillary Clinton Calls Many Trump Backers 'Deplorables,'" and G.O.P. Pounces," September 10, 2016, *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/us/politics/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables.html>.

12. Han, *In It to Win*, 185.

13. Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs*, 130–131, 169.

14. Allen and Parnes, *Shattered*, 3.

15. Clinton, *What Happened*, xii.

16. For a discussion of these issues, see Han and Heldman, eds., *Rethinking Madam President*.

17. Han, *In It to Win*, 183.
18. John F. Kennedy, a Catholic, remains the only non-Protestant to hold the office of the presidency, and Joseph Lieberman remains the only Jewish candidate nominated for president or vice president after his nomination as Al Gore's running mate in 2000.
19. Wayne, *The Road to the White House 2012*, 200–201.
20. See Kellerman and Rhode, eds., *Women & Leadership*, 7. See also Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind*.
21. Wilson, *Closing the Leadership Gap*, 36.
22. See Heith, "The Lipstick Watch," 123–130, and Woodall and Fridkin, "Shaping Women's Chances," 69–86.
23. Duerst-Lahti, "Presidential Elections: Gendered Space and the Case of 2012," 16–48.
24. Bystrom, "Advertising, Websites, and Media Coverage," 262.
25. Lawrence and Rose, *Hillary Clinton's Race for the White House*, 3–6.
26. Han, "Is the United States Really Ready for a Woman President?" 5.
27. Lawless, "Women, War, and Winning Elections," 479–490.
28. Streb et al., "Social Desirability Effects and Support for a Female American President," 76–89. This study found that roughly 26 percent of polling respondents are "angry or upset" about the prospect of electing a woman president, with this level of dissatisfaction constant across various demographic groups.
29. See Kenski and Falk, "Of What Is This Glass Ceiling Made?" 57–80.
30. Andrew Mercer, Claudie Deane, and Kiley McGeeney, "Why 2016 Election Polls Missed Their Mark," Pew Research Center, November 9, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/why-2016-election-polls-missed-their-mark>.
31. "Hillary Clinton Favorability Timeline," Pew Research Center, May 19, 2015, <http://www.people-press.org/2015/05/19/hillary-clinton-approval-timeline>.
32. Goren, "Fact or Fiction," 103.
33. Sheeler and Anderson, *Woman President*, 86.
34. See Wilson, *Closing the Leadership Gap*.
35. Cronin and Genovese, *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency*, 31.
36. "History of Women Governors," Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, 2019, <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/history-women-governors>.
37. See Fox and Lawless, "Entering the Arena?" 264–280.
38. Lisa Lerer and Susan Chira, "'There's a Real Tension.' Democrats Puzzle Over Whether a Woman Will Beat Trump," *New York Times*, January 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/05/us/politics/women-candidates-president-2020.html>.
39. Han and Heith, *Presidents and the American Presidency*, 67.
40. Han and Heldman, *Women, Power, and Politics*, 63.