

# THE DIFFERENCE WOMEN MAKE

## POLICY AND PERSPECTIVES

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### Women represent women.

- Women officials more commonly identify women as a distinct part of their constituencies and describe a sense of responsibility to represent women's concerns and perspectives in legislatures, from the local to national level.
- Women legislators have a major impact on the extent to which women's interests are represented in legislatures – a fact acknowledged by both women lawmakers and their male colleagues.
- Across time, office, and political parties, women, more often than men, take the lead on legislation focusing on issues that matter most to women (*health care, social services, gender discrimination, women, family, and children's issues, and the environment*) throughout the legislative process, no matter how those issues are defined.
- Regardless of the issue at hand, women legislators are more likely than their male colleagues to consider how laws will affect women once enacted.
- African-American women, in particular, are more likely than their male counterparts to propose and support legislation advancing women's interests *and* African-American interests.

A woman member brings to the table a greater focus on women's issues than a man might, even though men can be quite as zealous on an issue-by-issue basis...The kind of concentrated, systematic focus that goes from bill to bill...is what I think women mean when they say, 'Women represent women.' It means not just on this issue or that issue, but [that we]..in addition to everything else we do, keep a watch for women's issues.

CONGRESSWOMAN ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-DC)

### Women bring a different point of view on policy and power.

- Women lawmakers open the legislative agenda to new perspectives and new issues, in addition to bringing distinct and innovative approaches to policy and problem-solving.
- Women legislators differ from their male colleagues in their attitudes on public policy issues, with women in both parties more likely to support liberal or moderate positions on a variety of issues.

"The responsibility to represent women makes us more sensitive to the legislation that we're passing: how that legislation would impact families, and especially single mothers and children."

CONGRESSWOMAN ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

- Unlike their male colleagues, women in legislative and executive posts are motivated most often by policy goals, not power or prestige, in running for office and serving.
- Women emphasize the interdependence among citizens and issues instead of focusing on individuals.

### Women are effective legislators.

- Women – at the state and national levels – are at least as active and effective as male legislators at getting their legislation passed.

## LEADERSHIP STYLE AND LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

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### Women lead differently, and they lead in ways that benefit government.

- Women leaders are more partial to nonhierarchical collaboration, consensus building, and inclusion than are men, and they bring that style to politics.
- Women legislators have demonstrated a more democratic, less confrontational, and more hands-on approach to leadership.

“I think that we [women] are more prone to try to find ways to work together, to bring people together...So we bring that to the table.”

CONGRESSWOMAN SUE MYRICK (R-NC)

### Women govern differently, bringing a distinct style and substance.

- A majority of women lawmakers and their male colleagues report that women legislators alter the legislative process, making it more transparent and public. Moreover, they bring a different style of advocacy, debate, and behavior to the floor of the legislature.
- Women legislators gather policy information from different sources than men and rely on different types of information in making key decisions.
- Women executives are more willing to admit fiscal problems, propose changes to ingrained processes, and seek broader participation in deliberations.

## CITIZEN ACCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

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### Women candidates and officeholders excite and engage citizens in the political process.

- Women candidates mobilize voters, particularly women, and engage them in the political process. This effect is greatest in, though not limited to, competitive political environments where the woman candidate shares voters' political ideology or party affiliation.

“I think the significance [of having women in office] is opening doors for women generically, across the American tapestry of different cultures. When women open a door and go through that door and become effective – the bottom line is effective – at whatever they're doing, it opens a door in a multitude of different disciplines.”

SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN (D-CA)

- Women governors boost citizens' perceptions of government responsiveness and make them feel more capable of influencing governmental policy.
- Women's political engagement is enhanced when they are represented by women, particularly women who share their partisanship and policy perspectives. Research shows, “The more it looks as if politics is not simply a man's game, the more psychologically involved with politics women are.”

### Women legislators provide greater access to government, especially for disadvantaged groups.

- Women legislators and their male colleagues perceive that women state legislators provide increased access to the legislature for traditionally disadvantaged groups in American society, such as racial and ethnic minorities and the economically disadvantaged.
- Women legislators are more likely than their male colleagues to rely on constituent perspectives in agenda-setting and deliberations. Women lawmakers spend more time on constituent service than their male colleagues.
- Women governors are more likely than men to bring women into state government through high-level appointments.

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