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Center for American Women and Politics Funds Research Projects to Identify and Address Barriers and Opportunities to Women’s Political Power

For nearly five decades, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, has been committed to promoting greater knowledge and understanding about the role of women in American politics, enhancing women's influence in public life, and expanding the diversity of women in politics and government. Thanks to the generosity and commitment of Pivotal Ventures, an investment and incubation company founded by Melinda Gates, CAWP will fund nine research projects – including those conducted by advanced graduate students and faculty – in 2021 that help to identify and address barriers and opportunities to women’s political power. Overviews of each project are below and more information on grant recipients is available on [CAWP’s website](#).

Funded research projects were identified by both internal and external reviewers as meeting one or more priorities laid out in CAWP’s request for proposals, including leading with intersectionality, expanding research focus, and/or meeting the moment. These projects were also identified as among the most promising to yield insights that can be translated into action to increase women’s political power, including effective interventions to disrupt gender and/or intersectional biases in U.S. political institutions.

“Combined, these nine funded projects represent an investment of nearly \$180,000 into areas of research that have historically been under-valued and under-funded,” said Debbie Walsh, CAWP Director. “This investment not only illuminates the importance of this scholarship to relevant disciplines, but we are hopeful that it will also result in actionable findings to promote women’s political progress.”

CAWP Research Grant Recipients

Doctoral Students

Intersectional Advocacy: How She Reconfigures the State

Margaret Teresa Brower, University of Chicago

This project focuses on how women’s advocacy groups reconfigure the American state to make its institutions and policy structures more representative of an increasingly diverse polity. By studying feminist organizations within movements to end violence against women, this project highlights that activists who are orienting their work around class, racial, ethnic, and citizenship differences are engaging in a new way with the state. This approach to politics illuminates a new form of activism and leadership among women referred to as “intersectional advocacy.” Intersectional advocacy is a process of restructuring political institutions to better meet the needs of multi-marginalized populations. This

type of advocacy is very different than other approaches previously used by women's organizations, and it needs to be better understood. That is the goal of this project: to examine how women organizational leaders contest American political institutions to establish new structures and policies that represent women with intersecting marginalized identities as well as the challenges they face in leading this type of advocacy. For this proposed project, women leaders who build and sustain these types of organizations are the focus to understand how they navigate a set of intersectional politics in which their constituents are positioned between multiple issues of oppression (e.g. violence, racism, sexism). It also includes an examination of what tactics these advocates use to confront political institutions that reinforce the many different dimensions of this oppression and how they work within the bounds of the state to avoid further marginalizing some identity groups while protecting others. These are the challenges and possibilities of intersectional politics that this project is designed to underscore, interrogate, and understand.

Television News Media and Public Opinion towards Black Female Political Elites

Sydney L. Carr, University of Michigan

This study analyzes the ways in which national television news media in the U.S. shapes American public attitudes surrounding prominent Black female political figures. A key premise of this project is that Black women in the political arena face higher levels of negative news coverage and criticism when compared to their non-Black female counterparts. This study displays the significant implications that news media rhetoric has for broad public attitudes toward Black women political elites. Furthermore, this project presents a mixed-methodology approach to better understand the unique experiences faced by Black women in the political limelight. First, using an original sentiment scale, a manual content analysis is employed to examine nearly 800 news segment transcripts centered upon Black women political elites on the "big three" television networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC, in addition to both FOX and MSNBC. Specifically, these news segments center on Michelle Obama, Kamala Harris, Stacey Abrams, and Maxine Waters. In addition to the content analysis, this project employs original surveys that assess the extent to which news consumption among the American public has implications for views and attitudes toward Black women political figures. Further, this study presents a two-fold analysis: 1) an examination of media rhetoric surrounding Black women political elites, and 2) an analysis of the potential impacts of news sentiment on American public opinion. Moreover, this study illuminates the very substantial implications that television news political discourse has for American public opinion toward Black women in the political limelight.

Faculty/Post-Graduates

Bridges: How Black Women Coordinate the Lawmaking Efforts of Identity-Based Caucuses

Nadia E. Brown, Ph.D., Purdue University

Christopher Clark, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Anna Mitchell Mahoney, Ph.D., Tulane University

Legislative caucuses are a key component to ensuring trust among legislators. Caucuses provide the social networking, information sharing, and work distribution necessary for success in polarized state legislatures. In the proposed project, we draw upon representational identity theory as developed in Brown (2014) that asserts that both collective and individual experiences shape the political behavior of Black women. As members of Black legislative caucuses and Women's legislative caucuses, Black women bring the multiplicity of their identities to both legislative groups. Rather than a single axis approach, Black women bring to bear their full identity and how they seek to represent their constituents in

coalition with Black men and women of varying ethno-racial identities. In doing so, Black women lawmakers may be able to build coalitions by drawing on those multiple identities and serving as bridges within race and gender based legislative caucuses. Or Black women may fail to be fully incorporated in either identity-based caucus. To better understand the experience of Black women in caucuses we propose to conduct case studies in two different states with both Black and Women's caucuses: Maryland and Louisiana. Our approach allows us to compare the experiences of three marginalized groups, Black women, Black men, and white women. Using virtual semi-structured interviews, we will probe subjects to reflect on their membership in caucuses and the benefits and drawbacks of participation across a range of vectors including: personal, electoral, and policy matters. We will also collect press releases, news accounts, and primary documents from both the Black and Women's caucuses in these states. Our proposed project will offer a window into the world of legislatures from the perspective of identity politics.

Conceptualizing Caregiving and its Consequences for Attitudes and Engagement

Ivy A.M. Cargile, Ph.D., California State University, Bakersfield

Jill S. Greenlee, Ph.D., Brandeis University

Jennifer L. Merolla, Ph.D., University of California, Riverside

Rachel VanSickle-Ward, Ph.D., Pitzer College

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated the challenges of caregiving, particularly for women (Gates 2020). Typically, women in the U.S. do the majority of familial caretaking (Herd & Harrington Meyer 2002); during the pandemic, women face even greater challenges related to child and elder care and often devastating economic consequences (Gupta 2020, Horsley 2020, Kitchener 2020, Power 2020). Women of color have felt these effects most acutely (Bedford 2020, Holpuch 2020). In this project, we ask how the caregiving responsibilities that women often take on (e.g. childcare, elder care, sibling care, and the anticipation of those responsibilities) structure their political engagement and policy attitudes, focusing in particular on the context of the pandemic. Through an original survey and in-depth interviews, we analyze how the pandemic influences caregiving responsibilities and perceptions across diverse segments of the population and explore whether (and if so, how) women, whose time and resources are consumed by their caretaking responsibilities, are still able to make space for political engagement. Our analysis will help us promote women's political power in two practical and critical ways. First, it will help us understand the barriers placed by caregiving responsibilities, and thus put us in a better position to overcome them. Second, it will shed light on the opportunities and skill sets the caregiving experience provides for women in the political sphere. In painting a fuller picture of the relationship between caretaking and political engagement, we hope to help change and challenge traditional conversations around gender and care. More specifically, our work can help a) candidates and aspiring political actors better highlight and even celebrate their caregiving expertise and experience, and b) policymakers better frame and craft solutions to caretaking inequities.

Addressing Women's Safety to Vote

Emily M. Farris, Ph.D., Texas Christian University

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately one in four women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Beginning in 1991, states enacted address confidentiality programs to protect the addresses of survivors of intimate partner violence in public records, including voter registration. Approximately three-quarters of states have instituted address confidentiality programs to create legal, substitute addresses for survivors to escape abusers and retain their right to vote. The programs vary in terms of the eligibility, participation requirements,

and degree of protection. In this project, I explore what factors led to states' adoption of address confidentiality programs and what explains the varying levels of coverage in the address confidentiality programs. I aim to create a publicly available website of the data that advances the protection of survivors and encourages states and the national government to enhance these programs.

The U.S. Mayors Survey: Psychological Abuse and Physical Violence – The Longitudinal Perspective

Rebekah Herrick, Ph.D., Oklahoma State University

Sue Thomas, Ph.D., PIRE

Heidi Gerbracht, Equity Agenda

Ceri Jenkins, Mayors Innovation Project

Violence against women in politics is increasingly cited as a deterrent to their political participation. In 2019, the first research study in the United States that focused on psychological abuse and physical violence against officeholders reported that women mayors were more likely to experience psychological abuse and physical violence than men. Building on this foundational research, its co-authors are joining with leaders from the Mayors Innovation Project (MIP) housed at the COWS think tank at the University of Wisconsin and Equity Agenda to develop a biennial survey of mayors. For this proposed longitudinal research, we will expand the original survey questionnaire and will include a larger group of mayors than the original research so that we can better examine intersectional differences in the frequency and expression of abuse/violence.

Latina Leadership and Activism in Colorado

Celeste Montoya, Ph.D., University of Colorado Boulder

This research undertakes an expansive study of Latina leadership in Colorado, focusing on Latina pathways to and within public office, as well as their role in community and social justice organizations. The project will work towards providing a more thorough mapping of Latina engagement across the political terrain, characterizing when, where, why, and how Latinas engage politically, and exploring the form and impact of this engagement. While much of the emphasis will be placed on conducting an in-depth exploration of contemporary Latina leadership and activism in the state (using a mixed-methods approach), this study places Latina leadership in Colorado within the larger historical and geographic context. The case study will be paired with a comparative small-n analysis including other states in the Southwest (Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah), laying the groundwork for more extensive comparative studies in the future.

Mujeres, Movidas, y Movimiento: Comparative Study of Latina Candidate Emergence and Political Mobilization in California and Texas

Anna Sampaio, Ph.D., Santa Clara University

Christina Bejarano, Ph.D., Texas Woman's University

Latinas figured prominently in 2018 general election as candidates for political office, as political organizers, and as a key portion of the electorate in states with competitive races for Congress and governors' offices (Pew 2018, Sampaio 2018). While 2018 proved to be a defining election year for women of color generally and Latinas specifically, the volume and diversity of Latina candidates running for national office in 2020 surpassed the records set in 2018 (CAWP 2020). In particular, California and Texas represent two vastly different political landscapes with divergent political histories regarding Latina political participation and empowerment. This research will examine the emergence of Latina candidates for national office in 2018 and 2020, looking specifically at how the experiences of Latina

congressional candidates in California and Texas compared with each other and drawing lessons about these states for Latinas running for national office across the country. The research will utilize feminist ethnography to collect interviews and observational data from Latina congressional candidates in both California and Texas as well as political consultants and fundraisers who were instrumental in congressional races featuring Latina candidates.

Running for Justice? Understanding Black Women Judicial and Prosecutorial Candidates

Jamil Scott, Ph.D., Georgetown University

There is a growing body of literature that points to the impact of judicial decision making and prosecutorial discretion in the increasing gap in criminal justice outcomes for racial minorities in the United States. While scholars have attended to how judges and prosecutors are implicated in the racial disparities in convictions and sentencing, less attention has been paid to who runs and serves in these offices — particularly when these offices are elected positions. Judges and prosecutors are overwhelming white and male. However, the 2018 election brought a great deal of excitement due to a number of Black women being elected to the ranks of judges and prosecutors. This excitement comes at a time in which the relationship between people of color and the criminal justice system is likely at its most complicated. More attention is on judicial and prosecutorial decision making because of police violence against Black people in the United States. The proposed project seeks to evaluate why Black women seek elective office for criminal justice positions and how their presence in these roles influences group members' attitudes about the criminal justice system. I take a multi-method approach to address these questions (using interviews, an experiment, and election data). The goal of this multi-method approach is to reveal how Black women think of themselves as candidates for these positions, to understand how the public views Black women when they run, and to capture the contexts in which we are more or less likely to see Black women run for judicial and prosecutorial office.

About CAWP

The [Center for American Women and Politics](#) (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about women's political participation in the United States. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about the role of women in American politics, enhance women's influence in public life, and expand the diversity of women in politics and government. CAWP's education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women's underrepresentation in political leadership with effective, intersectional, and imaginative programs serving a variety of audiences. As the world has watched Americans considering female candidates for the nation's highest offices, CAWP's five decades of analyzing and interpreting women's participation in American politics have provided a foundation and context for the discussion.