

The Effect of Political Polarization on Female Presidential Primary Funding

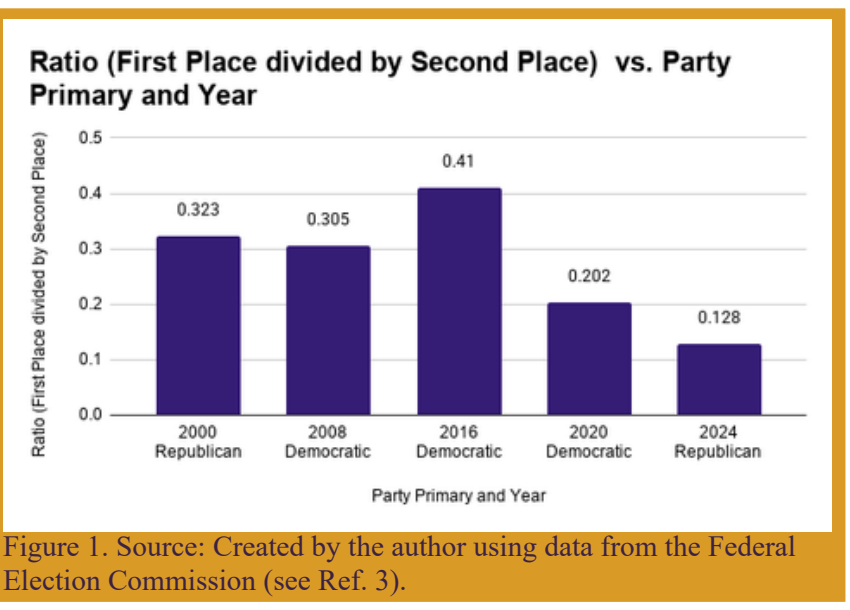
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Introduction:

Over the past years, America has seen a sharp increase in political polarization. It is imperative to study the factors affecting women in this context. Various studies have been done on political polarization relating to congressional elections. Yet, the presidency is the last major glass ceiling not broken through. My research question aims to explore effects of political polarization specifically on female presidential elections in order to better understand the issues female candidates face.

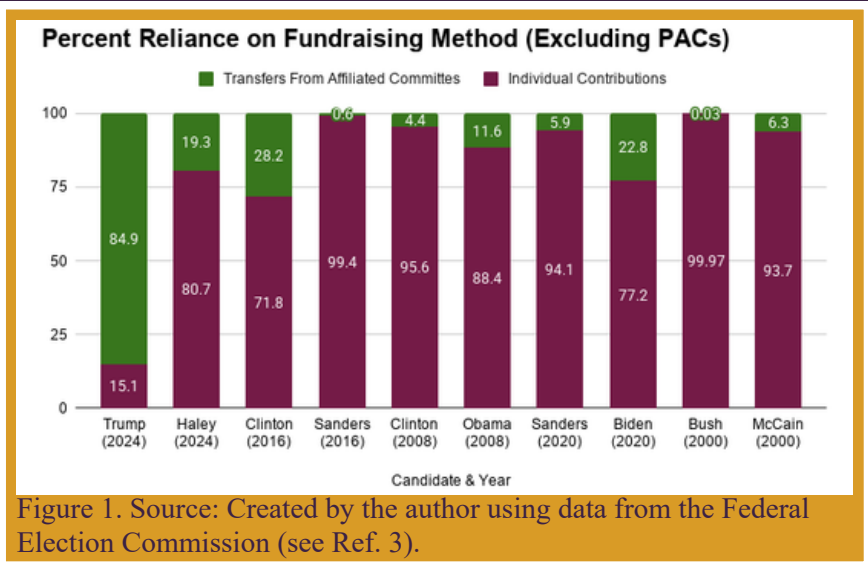
Methods:

I chose to focus on Hillary Clinton’s 2016 and Nikki Haley’s 2024 campaigns. I chose the Democratic 2008 (slightly polarized female and male), Democratic 2020 (polarized all male), and Republican 2000 (slightly polarized all male) primary elections as benchmarks. Then Clinton 2016 to compare when female candidate wins and Haley 2024 when they lose. I used FEC data on transfers from affiliated committees and individual contributions for all 2 two candidate’s campaigns for my data. I was looking specifically at the ratios between the winner and runner up and the funding method differences.



Results:

The polar election where the female candidate lost had a lower ratio, almost half of the polarized male ratio. The polar election where the female candidate won had the highest ratio in the data set. Haley and Clinton in 2016 also had percent reliances that were different than most of the data set.



Discussion:

Since a higher ratio means a smaller funding gap and a lower ratio means a higher funding gap, my research is consistent with previous congressional data that funding gaps are exacerbated with higher political polarization. This is because normal donors prioritize electability and lead to different funding networks, as seen in figure 2.

Conclusion:

Political polarization has a large negative impact on Female Presidential Primary funding by exacerbating the funding gap between male and female candidates. The research should be conducted when more data is available as more elections occur. Additionally, it is important to further understand other issues, such as the effort gap, that prevent female candidates to ensure that the best candidate, male or female, is elected.

Presentation References:

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2. Thomsen, D. M., & Swers, M. L. (2017). Which women can run? Gender, partisanship, and candidate donor networks. *Political Research Quarterly*, 70(2), 449–463.
3. Federal Election Commission. (2026). Public funding of presidential elections.
4. OpenSecrets. (2025). Where the money came from.