

Professional Activity Grant Final Report
Rosalyn Cooperman, Department of Political Science and International Affairs

Academic Year: 2009-10
Project Title: Running with EMILY and Susan: How Abortion Shapes Women's
Candidacies to Congress

Project Summary

This project examined the role played by women's PACs (political action committees which are authorized to raise funds on behalf of candidates running for elective office) in recruiting and funding women congressional candidates. Since 1990, women Democrats have significantly outnumbered their Republican counterparts as candidates to and members of Congress. One possible explanation for the uneven distribution of Democratic and Republican women candidates and representatives may be the result of women's organizations and PACs that overwhelmingly support Democratic, pro-choice women. Women's PACs are given much credit for funding women candidates, however much less is known about the specific means by which women's PACs aid women congressional candidates. In light of this unresolved research question I requested, and received, a course release in Fall 2009 to examine the fundraising activity of six women's PACs. Specifically, I examined campaign finance reports from 2000 to 2004 for the following organizations: National Women's Political Caucus; Women's Campaign Fund; National Organization for Women; EMILY's List; Women in the Senate and House (WISH); and, Susan B. Anthony List. I also created a larger dataset that tracks the campaign finance activity of women congressional candidates during this same time period.

Project's goals/objectives/anticipated results

The main purpose of this project was to pinpoint the aggregate effect of fundraising by women's PACs in congressional elections and identify the candidate characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, election status, partisanship of the congressional district, and, the presence of a female candidate of the opposing party that affect the probability of a woman candidate receiving an endorsement. Based on the data I had already compiled from these groups' 2006 and 2008 campaign finance reports, I expected much of my focus to center on two groups who work in opposition to one another – EMILY's List, which supports pro-choice women (Democratic) candidates, and Susan B. Anthony List, which supports pro-life women candidates. First, these two groups raise more funds than the remaining women's PACs combined and also bundle individual contributions from members to endorsed candidates. As such, I anticipated these groups would exert more influence over women's campaigns than those groups which gave only hard money contributions (limited by federal election campaign finance law to \$5,000 per election) to candidates. Second, these two groups provide additional resources to candidates' campaigns in the form of independent expenditures (whose contributions are NOT limited by federal campaign finance laws). An analysis of campaign finance data I collected indeed confirmed that EMILY's List and Susan B. Anthony List occupy positions of higher prominence in women's congressional campaigns. The more interesting and intriguing findings of this project, however, speak to HOW these two groups exercise influence. For pro-life candidates, I found that Susan B. Anthony List

makes strategic use of unlimited independent expenditures to assist both female AND male pro-life candidates, especially when they run against EMILY's List endorsed candidates. These independent expenditures generally take the form of direct mail to prospective voters and campaign ads on Christian radio stations in targeted congressional districts. In other words, the presence of an EMILY's List candidate in the opposing party's roster increases the probability of the Republican pro-life candidate (male or female) receiving Susan B. Anthony List funds. This finding is relevant because it demonstrates that an organization designed to fund pro-life women candidates will also fund pro-life male candidates in an attempt to defeat women pro-choice candidates. While this strategy may not increase the number of women Republican candidates, it may have the effect of narrowing the party gap by decreasing the number of women Democratic candidates.

Second, when looking at pro-choice women candidates I found that EMILY's List employs several strategies beyond providing hard money campaign contributions and bundling campaign contributions from members. EMILY's List targets its independent expenditures on direct mail and television ads in select congressional districts. In addition, EMILY's List reaches out to labor unions and Democratic state parties. That EMILY's List and labor unions, two traditional adversaries within the Democratic Party, work in cooperation with one another on behalf of endorsed women candidates is a finding of tremendous significance because it demonstrates the amount of clout EMILY's List enjoys within the Democratic Party structure. This finding was wholly unanticipated

and has profoundly changed the research focus of my larger project on women congressional candidates to include research on this emerging partnership between these two former adversaries.

Adequacy of the project's procedures and approaches

The primary method of information gathering for this project was the creation of a data base of women's PACs campaign finance activity. From there I created a model with dependent variables (e.g., the likelihood of a woman congressional candidate receiving a hard campaign contribution from all OR a specific women's PAC) and independent variables (e.g., contribution date, type of election, presence of a contested primary election, district partisanship, overall funds raised) for which I ran a logistic regression, MLE (maximum likelihood estimation). Given the bivariate nature of the dependent variable (the presence or absence of a woman's PAC campaign contribution), using MLE is the appropriate statistical procedure to employ.

In relation to the overall project approach, however, I underestimated two parts of this project. First, in my grant proposal I requested a course release to compile campaign finance data for women's PACs from 1992 to 2004. This proved to be too ambitious a time period to cover as I was only able to gather campaign finance data for the 2000 - 2004 election cycles. What I did not fully recognize in the grant application was that I had to create two data sets, not one. The (anticipated) first data set involved gathering campaign finance data for the six women's PACs which is time consuming but relatively straight-forward. I did not anticipate, however, having to create a second data set which

takes the campaign finance data for those women's PACs and compares it to all women congressional candidates in a given election cycle. In other words, the second data set takes all of the women's PAC activity in the context of ALL women candidates so that a true comparison can be made between those women who receive funds and those who do not. Compiling this data is extremely time intensive because it involves data gathering using multiple sources beyond the campaign finance data housed at the Federal Election Commission and its website. The end result is the creation of a data set that is more sophisticated, comprehensive, and rigorous. It is also a project more realistically undertaken during a sabbatical, not in a semester with only one course release.

Second, I underestimated the ability to make use of student researchers during the academic year. In my original grant application I requested an additional \$500 in funds to pay for a student aide in Fall 2009 to help with data collection and variable coding. I hired one undergraduate research assistant who began work on data collection but completed only a portion of the work before she quit and accepted a paid internship in the hopes of securing full time, permanent employment. I was unable to find a suitable replacement for my original student researcher so I did not use the full amount of allocated expenses.

Dissemination of Results

I presented my findings for women's PAC activity during the 2002 through 2008 election cycles at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. I am continuing to collect women's PAC campaign finance data from the 1990s as this project

is part of a larger book-manuscript length project on women congressional candidates. Earlier this summer I met in-person with a book editor from a trade press who has invited me to formally submit a prospectus for this project. Additionally, I incorporated my data set into lectures on campaign finance for my sections of PS 370, Women in Politics.

Summary of non-stipend budget expenditures

In my original grant proposal I requested and received \$500.00 to hire a student assistant to help with data collection and variable coding. As I indicated in the previous section, I did not fully use this \$500.00 appropriation.

Budget - \$500 in expenses to accompany a course release

Expenses: payment for a student assistant (15 hours @ \$8.00/hr = \$120.00)