

# News coverage of female politicians focuses on personality, males on the issues

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With more and more women representing the 50 states on Capitol Hill every year, many have noted that female politicians are not given the same treatment as males in the media. A recent study from a special mini symposium in *Political Research Quarterly* finds that news coverage of female politicians focuses more on character traits and less on their policy arguments than it does for their male counterparts.

"There is clear variation across [political] races in terms of the focus of news stories," stated study authors Johanna Dunaway, Regina G. Lawrence, Melody Rose, and Christopher R. Weber. "In line with the previous literature and our own expectations, on the whole, races with female candidates are more likely to feature trait stories than male versus male races."

Dunaway et. al collected data from approximately 10,000 newspaper articles covering statewide elections (Senate and gubernatorial races) in the 2006 and 2008 elections across the US. They found that for male-only [election coverage](#), the stories focused on character traits 6% of the time and the issues 55.5% of the time, for male-female races, the articles focused on traits 10.8% of the time and the issues 53.1% of the time, and for female-only elections, the stories focused on character traits 9.4% of the time and on the issues 51.7% of the time.

The researchers concluded, "Races with a female candidate lead to news that is more focused on the [personal traits](#) and characteristics of the candidates, and this finding is especially stark for gubernatorial

campaigns."

The article, "Traits versus Issues: How Female Candidates Shape Coverage of Senate and Gubernatorial Races," by Dunaway et. al. is one of three articles that makeup the special mini symposium of *PRQ*. Each of the articles is available free for a limited time at the links below:

- Sarah Burns, Lindsay Eberhardt and Jennifer L. Merolla: "What is the difference between a Hockey Mom and a Pit Bull? Presentations of Palin and Gender Stereotypes in the 2008 Presidential Election"
- Sarah Allen Gershon: "Media Coverage of Minority Congresswomen and Voter Evaluations: Evidence from an Online Experimental Study"

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