

# A Comparative Assessment of Hillary Clinton's 2016 Presidential Race

Farida Jalalzai<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This article assesses how Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential loss conforms to established findings within the gender and politics literature about the difficulties women face in running for presidential office. In many ways, Clinton's loss was predictable, though at times she defied the conventional wisdom. The presidential glass ceiling remains fully intact in the United States now and perhaps the foreseeable future.

## Keywords

Hillary Clinton, presidents, gender, women candidates, 2016 election

## Introduction

By January 2017, as many as 21 countries could be led by a woman . . . 2017 could be the “year of the woman” around the world. (Timsit 2016)

The aforementioned quotation from *Politico* places the significance of a Hillary Clinton presidential victory within the context of other seemingly auspicious developments worldwide for women executives. It was a fairly typical news story published during the summer of 2016 when media interest in women in executive power increased as Hillary Clinton's election as the first woman president of the United States seemed likely. For decades, women had advanced to executive office in many diverse countries while the United States stood out as a glaring omission. The critical role the country plays on the world stage made the absence of the United States from this list of cracked executive glass ceilings particularly noteworthy, magnifying the potential implications of a Hillary Clinton win. Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Theresa May had just joined the ranks of German Chancellor Angela as a female leader of a highly prominent G-7 country that same summer. If Clinton also proved victorious, women would head three of the most influential countries worldwide. Not only was the quality of countries governed by women notable, so too were the sheer quantities; if prominent female candidates, including Clinton, won their races, the number of women holding executive power simultaneously in 2017 would be record breaking (Timsit 2016), moving from 18 to 21.

Of course, neither a first female president of the United States nor record numbers of women executives worldwide

would be. Hillary Clinton and women like Keiko Fujimori of Peru lost their presidential bids. Two sitting female presidents—Dilma Rousseff of Brazil and South Korea's Park Guen-hye—were forced from power through impeachment. President Park's climb and fall did not seem as surprising given her distinction as the daughter of the former dictator Park Jung-Hee.<sup>1</sup> She, like most of her female counterparts in Asia, arose as political heirs in contexts where executive power was as easily taken away as it was given (Lee forthcoming). Just a few years earlier, however, political commentators had enthusiastically pointed to Latin America as the world leader in electing women to presidential offices (Romero 2013), making Rousseff's impeachment especially disheartening. While women's reliance on the family path in Latin America had subsided with the elections of women like Dilma Rousseff, Laura Chinchilla of Costa Rica, and Michelle Bachelet of Chile, the optimism surrounding

<sup>1</sup>Keiko Fujimori, also the daughter of a former dictator, lost her bid by only .2 of the vote in a runoff election (Coolidge and Bell 2017). This illustrates that family ties do not always afford victory. Moreover, Fujimori and Park had both accumulated extensive political experience, which is typical of women politicians from political families (Jalalzai 2013).

<sup>1</sup>Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Farida Jalalzai, Oklahoma State University, 201 Murray Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078-1060, USA.  
 Email: [farida.jalalzai@okstate.edu](mailto:farida.jalalzai@okstate.edu)



**Table 1.** Where Women Lead.

Number of Different Women	Number of Countries	Examples
0	118 (61 percent of 195 autonomous countries have not had a woman leader)	United States, Japan, Russia, China
1	45	Chile, Estonia, Liberia, Pakistan
2	21	Iceland, Ireland, Philippines, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom
3	6	Finland, Lithuania, Norway, Peru, Poland, South Korea,
4	1	Haiti
5	1	Switzerland

Note: Seventy-four countries have had women executives; 39 percent of these countries have had two or more different women in power.

women's presidential advancement in the region had given way to disappointment as Rousseff, Bachelet, and Fernández (of Argentina) encountered plummeting approval in the face of economic downturns as well as allegations of wrongdoing (Gilbert 2016).

It is fair to say that 2017 has *not* started out as a banner year for women executives; this article argues, however, that this was foreseeable, as was Clinton's eventual defeat. Clinton repeatedly faced accusations of corruption during the campaign. Even unsupported notions of Clinton's wrongdoing seemed to hurt her candidacy more than substantiated ones Trump faced. While most pundits would argue that gender played no role in her loss, claims that Clinton simply ran a bad campaign or was a "bad candidate" are not wholly separable from gender. While firmly proving that women's struggle gaining dominant presidencies worldwide results from gender discrimination is beyond the scope of this article (and itself an impossible task), findings suggest that executive office remains a male bastion. This is particularly true when analyzing the most daunting of glass ceilings—a presidency exercising dominant executive powers both domestically and internationally and elected by a popular vote. That the United States continues to lag behind much of the rest of the world in having a woman at the helm of executive power sends a troubling signal of women's political status. Clinton, a woman with a large financial war chest, family ties to power, name recognition, party support at both stages of the election, and extensive political experience, could not win against Trump, who had many more serious flaws. This article assesses ways Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential loss both challenges and overall confirms findings within the gender and executive politics literature about the difficulties women face in running for presidential office worldwide.

The first section of this article examines trends related to women's executive office holding. The second highlights factors established in the comparative literature related to women's ability to break through the executive glass ceiling. The third scrutinizes the processes related to gaining presidential office within the United States and how these pose significant barriers to women. The fourth places Clinton's

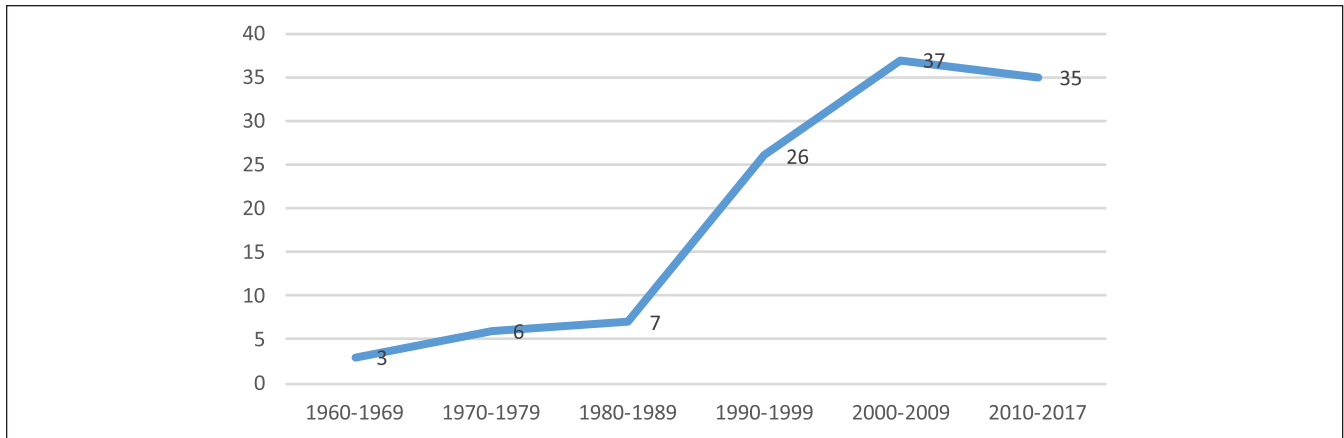
2016 bid within both the global and domestic context, investigating how Clinton's case confirms existing knowledge but also defied it. I argue that Clinton possessed important personal advantages that women typically lack and also had the benefit of an open electoral environment absent incumbents. That her unarguably less qualified opponent won suggests the durability of the American presidential glass ceiling; executive institutions and electoral processes remain difficult for women to navigate as the public continues to associate the presidency with men and masculinity.

## Trends in Women's Executive Advancement Worldwide

### "Where Women Lead"

Had Hillary Clinton won the 2016 presidential race, the United States would be coming very late to the game in terms of women's executive office holding. Since 1960, when Sirimavo Bandaranaike first cracked through the executive glass ceiling in Sri Lanka, through January 1, 2017, 114 different women have served as executives of their countries. Forty-nine have been presidents (43 percent), and 65 ascended as prime ministers (57 percent). They have governed 74 countries. In fact, 39 percent of countries where women have governed have seen at least two different women executives take power (see Table 1). These include wide-ranging contexts such as Finland, Haiti, Argentina, New Zealand, and Bangladesh. Twenty-six of the 114 women served in the capacities "acting" or "provisional" leaders (13 presidents and 13 prime ministers). This leaves 88 of the 114 being noninterim, 52 of whom are prime ministers (59 percent) and 36 (41 percent) presidents.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>For names and leaders, findings based on author's analysis of data from Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership and Zarate's Political Collections websites as well as various media reports. For powers, author analysis of the Presidential Power database (Doyle and Elgie 2016), various scholarly articles including Siaroff (2003) and Jalalzai (2013), media analysis, and country constitutions.



**Figure 1.** Number of women executives over time.

**Table 2.** Women Presidents Currently in Power.

Country	Leader	Powers	Path	In Office
Chile	Michelle Bachelet	Dominant	Popular vote	2006–2010; 2012–
Estonia	Kersti Kaljulaid	Weak	Indirect	
Liberia	Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf	Dominant	Popular vote	2006–
Lithuania	Dalia Grybauskaitė	Powerful	Popular vote	2009–
Malta	Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca	Weak	Indirect	2014–
Croatia	Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović	Powerful	Popular vote	2015–
Nepal	Bidhya Devi Bhandari	Weak	Indirect	2015–
Marshall Islands	Hilda Heine	Dominant	Indirect	2016–
Switzerland	Doris Leuthard	Weak	Indirect	2010; 2017

### Women Leaders, 1960–2017

Women executives made fairly limited progress until the 1990s, when their numbers nearly quadrupled. More than three-quarters of all female presidents and prime ministers entered office in the past 20 years, and their quantities have climbed faster since 2010 than any other decade thus far. Quantities of women executives still prove woefully sparse. Sixty-one percent of countries throughout the world have yet to elect or appoint a woman national executive.<sup>3</sup> Women have yet to crack the executive ceiling in other areas, including the Middle East (with the exception of Israel) and North

Africa, as well as some of the most of the high-profile countries such as Russia, China, Japan, and of course, the United States (see Figure 1).

### Women Currently in Power

The dearth of women executives is even more glaring when examining their quantities at the beginning of 2017 in comparison to their male counterparts. Currently, only 15 women hold executive posts. Of these, 9 are presidents, but less than half of them were elected by popular vote (see Table 2). Moreover, only two exercise dominant authority in their capacities.<sup>4</sup> Overall, a mere 6 percent of all executives worldwide currently in power are women.<sup>5</sup> A record year for women would only require 20 women to hold power simultaneously. Even in this scenario, women would comprise less than 8 percent of all executives, hardly a cause for celebration. We must also account for quality of position and

<sup>3</sup>I excluded from analysis women occupying positions not conforming to presidential or prime ministerial office such as collective executives (as in San Marino or Bosnia, etc.). I also omit leaders of nonautonomous countries since ultimate authority lies with another government. Since Taiwan’s independence from China is contested, President Tsai is excluded. A small number of women served in both prime ministerial and presidential capacities in the same country. Others led officially as interim leaders prior to securing more permanent appointments. Since the unit of analysis is the woman leader, I do not count each position as a separate case. In instances where the same woman held two different types of executive positions, I generally analyze them in the position they held longer.

<sup>4</sup>This number is based on the U.S. Department of State’s estimation of the existence of 195 autonomous countries.

<sup>5</sup>These assessments are based on country constitutions, media reports, the Presidential Power database (Doyle and Elgie 2016), as well as Siaroff (2003) and Jalalzai (2013).

influence of the country. Women, compared to their male counterparts, more often ascend to relatively weak posts and gain offices through appointment as opposed to popular election, a point engaged subsequently. Even with high-profile female executives such as Angela Merkel (consistently ranked as the world's most powerful female leader by *Forbes Magazine*), women still rarely lead more visible countries on the world stage. Why does executive office remain almost exclusively a male domain?

### Women Executives: What We Know

Research tends to reinforce the importance of political institutions to women gaining executive power, while structural variables exert mixed findings. Women disproportionately govern in dual executive systems, with both a president and prime minister (Jalalzai 2008, 2013). Power imbalances often relegate women to weaker positions. We may view presidents exercising authority within a unified executive system (where the president is the sole national executive) and others governing in dual executive systems with a powerful or weak prime minister as particularly strong and influential. Through the beginning of 2017, only 17 (15 percent of the total number of women executives) women have held power as dominant presidents.<sup>6</sup> Of these, only 10 women initially gained power through a popular vote, and a mere 4 did so absent blood or marital connections to either a former prime minister or president or a major opposition figure.<sup>7</sup> All told, only 4 percent of the 114 female executives have entered office as dominant presidents of their countries absent family connections to power and through a popular vote. This suggests that Clinton faced a daunting challenge.

Few women secure presidencies where they do not share power with a prime minister; those operating in systems where a president dominates almost always occupy the much weaker prime ministerial role (Jalalzai 2010, 2013). Women also disproportionately govern in parliamentary systems (Thames and Williams 2013).

Women's levels in the legislature appear relevant to the rise of women presidents and premiers (Jalalzai 2013; Thames and Williams 2013), though their proportions as cabinet ministers is unrelated to their ascensions (Jalalzai 2008, 2013; see also Krook and O'Brien 2012).

Women's tendencies to govern as prime ministers is not a result of there being more of these positions available for

contestation as presidential positions are more plentiful.<sup>8</sup> Since they routinely possess fewer powers than presidents, women's greater likelihood of being prime ministers presents important consequences. While a larger segment of women prime ministers hold dominant authority in their systems, they face significant vulnerabilities, namely, being ousted from office at any point and exercising power more collaboratively. Moreover, several female prime ministers hold very weak positions. This is particularly the case for those in Africa, who govern under a much stronger president. A major liability facing nearly all these weak prime ministers is that they can be dismissed by both parliament and the president.<sup>9</sup>

Women's greater tendency to hold prime ministerships likely relates to their depiction as more consensus-driven players rather than autonomous actors. These limitations may be linked to stereotypes of women as softer and more collaborative leaders. Women rarely lead more internationally powerful countries, as evidenced by economic and military strength and nuclear capabilities. Even if a woman holds the bulk of political power within a country, her significance can be further enhanced if the country is a major global player. Women, however, seldom join this even more exclusive club of leaders.

We must also account for the process of becoming an executive candidate, particularly for presidential office. Prevailing findings suggest that primaries present hurdles to women not because they cannot win public votes; rather, they hesitate to self-nominate and run for office (Hinojosa 2012; Lawless and Fox 2010). Self-nomination also strengthens the influence of local power monopolies and clientelism (Hinojosa 2012). Political machines often recruiting candidates also remain less open to women (Bruhn 2003; Helmke and Levitsky 2004). More centralized and selective processes alleviate the problems of self-nomination and limited access to local networks, explaining why women typically fare better under these arrangements (Hinojosa 2012).

Though their numbers have grown over time, women executive candidates remain few. An analysis of all women presidential candidates running in general elections throughout the world through May 2010 identified at least 300 different female presidential candidates since the late 1800s. Given the long timeframe, this is a fairly low number, and women tend not to run at all in some regions like Northern Africa and the Middle East. While women worldwide have substantially

<sup>6</sup>Based on author analysis that 134 presidencies and 118 prime ministerships exist resulting in total of 252 executive posts. About 236 men occupied these posts in January 2017 while only 16 women did.

<sup>7</sup>This number only includes noninterim women presidents. Dominant presidents exercise the bulk of powers within either a unified system where no other executives share authority or in a dual executive system where they share governing responsibilities with a prime minister.

<sup>8</sup>Johnson Sirleaf's father was a national legislator, Chinchilla's father served as national comptroller, and Bachelet's father was an Air Force General and Pinochet opponent. Since I am applying a fairly strict definition of family ties, however, I do not count them as having a family connection here. In the two cases where women had connections to major opposition figures—Chamorro of Nicaragua and Aquino of Philippines—their husbands were presidential aspirants slain because of their opposition to the regime.

<sup>9</sup>According to author analysis of Zartales Political Collections website (2017), 134 presidencies and 118 prime ministerships exist.

increased their candidacies over the past several years, they rarely secure substantial levels of public support. In fact, the vast majority does not even gain 5 percent of the vote (Jalalzai 2010). Most victorious women presidential candidates did not garner electoral majorities but were elected through pluralities or majority runoffs (MROs), which require a second round of voting if no candidate receives a majority—or a qualified majority (Nunez and Theis 2013). The benefit to this for political minorities is that they may consolidate broader support in the next stage when they appear more viable, having finished near the top but absent a majority or even plurality vote in the first round (Carey 2003).

In nearly all cases, triumphant women did not have to spar against incumbents (who remain, almost universally male). Among candidates elected by the popular vote, women enjoyed a mere 5 percent chance of victory.<sup>10</sup> Coolidge and Bell (2017) found that while women waged candidacies in about a quarter of all executive contests (including both presidential and prime ministerial bids) between 2014 and 2016, only five women won their races; all but one of these women were incumbents (Coolidge and Bell 2017). Since that analysis only observed candidates or parties attaining at least 5 percent of the vote, it underestimates women's difficulties at the polls since most women candidates fail to attain this level of support.<sup>11</sup> Women's losses cannot easily be explained by candidate quality as many women lost to less experienced male challengers who ran as "populist" candidates (Coolidge and Bell 2017).

As opposed to institutional factors, structural conditions render mixed findings in explaining women's rise to power. Women executives govern in many contexts where women in the general public trail behind men in levels of educational and professional attainment (Jalalzai 2008, 2013; Thames and Williams 2013). They have also gained power within the very contexts where public opinion demonstrates less support for women in political positions (Paxton and Hughes 2017). One of the ways this puzzle is explained centers on family connections to power. Between 1960 and 2010, nearly one-quarter of women executives hailed from political families (Jalalzai 2013). This path has proved especially important in Asia and Latin America. Members of the well-known benefit from name recognition, press coverage, networks, political socialization, and public trust (Derichs,

Fleschenberg, and Hüstebeck 2006; Hinojosa 2012). Major electoral defeats or scandals also open up political space to women (Campus 2013), who can use gender stereotypes of being healers, unifiers, or reformers when the window of opportunity opens in post-conflict societies (Thompson 2002).

Women executive aspirants worldwide experience more trivialized coverage than their male counterparts (Kittilson and Fridkin 2008; Murray 2010). Once in power, women executives maneuver through stereotypical coverage; common gendered frames include the wife of (Murray 2010); the peacemaker, nurturer, and unifier (Cantrell and Bachman 2008); or Iron Lady (Isaac 2012).<sup>12</sup>

Scholars do not fully understand the extent to which women executive candidates face sexism from the general public. While most research fails to support claims of gender discrimination against women candidates (Dolan 2014; Hayes and Lawless 2016; but see Mo 2015), these studies do not analyze presidential contests and limit their analyses to the United States. Some scholars examining the influence of sexism in national executive races note how women candidates craft specific strategies to troubleshoot for potential discrimination or negative stereotypes (Carroll 2009). For example, since the public might view women as more honest, women candidates in countries struggling with corruption may highlight their goals of making government more accountable and transparent. Or, given the double bind women regularly face (Jamieson 1995), they might develop more complex strategies by presenting a combination of "masculine" and "feminine" traits and issues (Carroll 2009; Jalalzai 2016).<sup>13</sup> As such, gender remains a relevant factor that shapes women's electoral prospects.<sup>14</sup>

## Presidential Politics in the United States

Given the trends and explanations for women's low level of executive office holding, why has the United States failed to elect a woman president? The U.S. presidency presents many obstacles for women to surmount, particularly the institutional procedures related to presidential nomination and election. The United States stands apart from other countries in the sheer complexity of electoral procedures related to presidential ascension. Federalism results in complex and multilayered candidate selection procedures (Burden 2009).

<sup>10</sup>Many female African prime ministers remained only briefly in their posts, several sacked by the presidents who appointed them, including Boye (Senegal), Batista de Sousa (Sao Tome and Principe), and Domitien (Central African Republic). Of course, presidents may face impeachment and ultimately lose power, which is how Rousseff (Brazil) and Park (South Korea) lost power.

<sup>11</sup>Only 21 of 300 candidates were ultimately victorious but Perón of Argentina (who was never a presidential candidate) and Sukarnoputri who succeeded to the presidency in 2002 but was unable to win election subsequent to her succession to the presidency in 1999 (for the elections of 2004 and 2009). Indonesian presidential elections were indirect until 2004.

<sup>12</sup>Twenty-eight of 105 candidates that reached this threshold were women.

<sup>13</sup>The double bind is defined essentially as a Catch-22 that women face in politics. It manifests in many ways. For example, women who are considered feminine will be judged incompetent while women who are competent will be judged as unfeminine (Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Jamieson 1995).

<sup>14</sup>Men do not have to similarly offset being a man when pursuing executive office, though they may have to demonstrate their masculine credentials (Katz 2016).

The public selects presidential nominees at either caucuses or more commonly, primary elections. In the general election, they vote for delegates pledged to the public choice. Each party also now has a number of unpledged delegates not linked to the public vote. As stated, more open and defused nominations structures typically present obstacles to women (Hinojosa 2012).

This very complex electoral process also makes it difficult to navigate the steep financial costs necessary to secure a nomination, limiting the number of viable candidates. While women candidates pursuing lower offices in the United States raise as much money, if not more, than their similarly situated male counterparts (Farrar-Myers 2007; Sanbonmatsu 2015), all modern female presidential aspirants prior to Clinton in 2008 were hindered by the large sums needed to wage a winning presidential campaign (Farrar-Myers 2003, 2007, Gutgold 2006).

The American electoral system makes the state distribution of popular votes decisive to presidential election outcomes. Candidates, however, may then win with less than a plurality of the popular vote and with an overrepresentation of votes cast in small states (Dahl 2001).<sup>15</sup> Women face the complicated task of appealing to voters in certain states, some of which are more egalitarian than others.

Rather than a dual executive structure, the president of the United States operates in a unified presidential system affording very strong powers. As both head of state and government, the American presidency is a fusion of ceremony and substance. Ceremonial duties support feminine leadership because of their symbolic (symbolizing the nation) and apolitical (absent of partisan or political content) nature. The American president performs several ritualistic functions for the country and embodies the people of the state. These roles and functions may uphold expectations that women could provide unity and act on behalf of others rather than their own agendas. Most presidential powers, however, are substantive and span domestic and international issues and encompass both stereotypically “male” and “female” policies. The issues on the political landscape obviously differ depending on the particular context and time. Several substantive responsibilities are also exceedingly “masculine,”<sup>16</sup> including the role of commander in chief

(Duerst-Lahti 2007). Foreign policy powers are also numerous (again, a stereotypically masculine realm), including forging executive agreements and negotiating treaties with other countries (Patterson 2008). The traits deemed important for the presidency are highly “masculine,” including strength and an ability to command authority, act quickly, determinedly, and often unilaterally (Duerst-Lahti 1997). Women candidates may be disadvantaged in continually having to demonstrate their prowess in this regard.

Prior to the 2016 election, all successful presidential candidates came to office with legislative, executive, or military experience or a combination of backgrounds (Crockett 2017). One would think that women candidates in particular would be required to attain the necessary, albeit unofficial, qualification of political experience to be viewed as presidential. Due to the long-standing association of the presidency with men, women likely need to bring in even more experience than their male counterparts to convince the public they were up to the job (Katz 2016).

Media coverage still places women at a disadvantage. The media plays an essential role in American campaigns, and elections increasingly have become personality-driven contests. Some of the most overt examples of discriminatory reporting are from recent U.S. presidential contests (Aday and Devitt 2001; Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Carroll 2009; Carroll and Dittmar 2010; Falk 2008; Gutgold 2006; Heith 2003; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010). Reports on appearance and personal lives are just some of the persistent inequities facing women. Women also endure scrutiny regarding their fitness for the job and subjected to gendered language. Media portrayals of political candidates reinforce traditional gender stereotypes of women. Women presidential aspirants disproportionately face reporting on physical appearances and family lives (and more petty and negative coverage than their male counterparts; Carroll and Dittmar 2010; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Miller et al. 2010).

Presidential elections are held once every four years, and the United States is a very stable political system with few instances of disruption. The lack of turnover hampers women’s presidential chances, as does the relative security of a president once in office compared to prime ministers and presidents in less stable environments. Beyond individual powers, the status a country holds on the world stage is also vital. This too presents a major obstacle. The United States is part of the G-7, indicating its major economic influence. It is also one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and possesses nuclear capabilities. The American president is one of the most dominant individual players on the world stage. This presents a major hurdle for potential female contenders.

In sum, executive institutions and process present difficulties for women, as does the continued association of the presidency with “masculine” issues and traits.

<sup>15</sup>Though a two-party system, pluralities may result from independent and third-party candidates receiving a minor percentage of the overall vote.

<sup>16</sup>Virtually every culture is saturated with gender stereotypes, viewing women and men as competent in different issue areas and possessing varying traits. The “masculine” association of toughness favors men in executive positions while compassion is a liability for women (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). In cross-national studies, people tend to view leaders possessing “masculine” traits that they associate with men—not women (Sczesny et al. 2004). The public considers women and men proficient in different policy areas. They see women more skilled in “feminine” areas like social welfare and health care and men stronger on national defense and other “masculine” issues (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993).

## Hillary Clinton's 2016 Presidential Bid

How does Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential bid relate to established findings suggesting the difficulties women face in pursuing presidencies? Her case demonstrates that women can surmount some of the obstacles outlined previously while also affirming continued hurdles. The presidential glass ceiling remains fully intact in the United States now and perhaps the foreseeable future.

Clinton gained the support of voters and political elites to win the nomination. The Democratic Party elite rallied behind Clinton. While she faced a few male challengers, only Independent Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders proved competitive. Sanders's decision to throw his hat in the ring drew scrutiny since it challenged the narrative of Clinton being the consensus candidate as he generated enthusiasm among key demographics less than excited about a Clinton presidency (Chozick and Alcindor 2016). These groups included younger and more liberal voters who viewed Sanders as offering change, even a political outsider. This outsider image held despite the fact that Sanders had served in Congress for nearly 30 years and shared the prevailing descriptive characteristic of nearly all presidents—being a white man.

Beyond lacking many rivals for the nomination, the Democratic Party preference for Clinton's candidacy manifested in different ways, including scheduling debates on days and times drawing low audience shares and filling of convention committees with Clinton loyalists. The Democratic Party Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz's leaked emails confirmed the committee's preference for Clinton's nomination since it was supposed to take a neutral position as the primaries and caucuses proceeded (Ball 2016). Superdelegates strongly supported Clinton even at the earliest stages of the nominating campaign. Media outlets tended to report the unpledged delegate totals along with Clinton's pledged delegates, reinforcing her frontrunner standing, suggesting an insurmountable lead (Abramson 2016). These examples confirm findings that women may be selected as nominees if parties play a central role in determining the winner. In the end, Clinton also attained more than enough of the popular vote to win the nomination, a feat no other woman had accomplished before. It is unlikely, however, that this would have been possible absent such strong party support.

Clinton won at least 2.8 million more votes than Republican candidate Donald Trump (about 48 percent to 46 percent) in the general election (BBC News 2016). That she amassed more votes among the American public in the general election is a departure from prevailing trends. Of course, like other female presidential aspirants in the United States and worldwide, she still failed to obtain a majority of votes overall. She also lost key states, including Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio, securing 232 electoral votes compared to Trump's 306 (BBC News 2016). She lost despite three

critical and related advantages: financial resources, vast political experience, and family ties.

Clinton possessed significant financial resources in 2008, and she held a fundraising advantage in 2016 as she raised nearly \$500 million in direct campaign contributions and over \$200 million more in outside monies, twice as much as Trump's totals (opensecrets.org 2017). A woman, therefore, accumulated a substantial presidential war chest.

We cannot separate her successful fundraising from the quality she offered as a candidate. Clinton had established a long list of political credentials. Her supporters, including President Obama, pointed to her as the most qualified presidential candidate in American history. Though a debatable claim (see Nelson 2016), Clinton undoubtedly boasted a very extensive political resume, which included four years as secretary of state and two terms as a U.S. senator. As a woman, Clinton likely needed such qualifications to convince the public of her preparedness for the presidency. Her roles lent foreign policy expertise, countering traditional feminine stereotypes. Her time as First Lady provided firsthand knowledge of the presidency, but her subsequent entry into formal political roles also rebuffed potential criticisms (commonly waged in 2008) that her primary credential was being the wife of Bill Clinton.

We cannot ignore that Hillary Clinton was not just any woman, but the wife of a former president. As demonstrated throughout this article, women gaining dominant presidencies worldwide have tended to do so as members of political families. In light of the comparative patterns presented, it seems no coincidence that a woman with family links made it closer than any other to the White House. Having been First Lady factored into her gaining election to the U.S. Senate and competitive 2008 nomination bid. The general disadvantages women face in their presidential pursuits—particularly for dominant presidencies in internationally influential countries—were mitigated through these connections. This does not mean that Clinton lacked the skill, experience, or competence for the job. Furthermore, her connection in some ways hurt rather than helped. It may even be argued that to stand a real chance of winning a dominant presidency, women must amass the highest political credentials in addition to having a family tie to executive power; this is a tall order.

The Clintons tend to elicit very strong feelings among the public and particularly negative views among more conservative demographics. Being the wife of Bill Clinton likely contributed to her unpopularity as a candidate among some segments of the population. A great deal of this negativity, however, was directed at Hillary Clinton herself, dating back to when she was First Lady and continuing as she made her foray in political office. A fairly typical view held by her detractors was that she was "Bill, but without the charisma" (Goldberg 2016). More detrimental were that more than half of the public held negative perceptions of her, particularly that she was corrupt, dishonest, and unethical (McCarthy

2016). According to Goldberg (2016) “The perception of perpetual scandal surrounding Clinton can make it seem as if she must be hiding something monstrous, especially to those who are predisposed against her.” Some charges of wrongdoing traced back to her time as First Lady and directly involved her husband. Other scandals related to her tenure as secretary of state, including “Emailgate,” which some viewed as a manufactured story (Eichenwald 2015) and an example of the misogyny she persistently endured (Lakoff 2016). As Long (2016) states, “High unfavorability ratings are hard to overcome, but that’s especially true for a candidate whose detractors have had decades to practice their attacks.”

Over her career, Clinton also developed a reputation for being too calculating and ambitious, tropes women seeking power commonly face. Ironically, that she established an independent political career after she left the White House fueled speculations that she wanted to be president too much and would stop at nothing to be elected. Here we see a clear double bind—if Clinton’s main qualification prior to her bid was as First Lady, she would be attacked as just benefitting from being the “wife of” (Murray 2010). Yet, the high level of experience she obtained after her time in the White House, including her 2008 candidacy, meant that she sought power to a fault. Moreover, Donald Trump could play on these conceptions of his rival throughout his candidacy.

Clinton was subjected to gendered media coverage (Presidential Gender Watch, n.d.). A plethora of stories engaged the negative opinions the public held about Clinton. Accusations that she was “over prepared” (Paquette 2016) spoke to beliefs that Clinton was disingenuous. Journalists calling for her to smile more or criticizing the shape of her mouth (Cauterucci 2016) placed an importance of her appearing softer or more “feminine.” The media focus on Emailgate as the dominant story leading up to the election is particularly striking (Boehlert 2016). This over-attention to scandal reinforced perceptions of Clinton’s dishonesty and engagement in corruption. Scandal overshadowed Clinton’s policy stances throughout the campaign (Boehlert 2016). While scandalous coverage usually dominates election coverage, Donald Trump received three times more attention on policy matters than Clinton (Patterson 2016). Only 4 percent of Clinton-related stories during the summer of 2016 encompassed policy (Patterson 2016). Especially troubling was the level of negativity she faced. According to Thomas Patterson (2016): “News reporting on her (Clinton) policy issues was more than two-to-one negative, and it was eleven-to-one negative for reports relating to her personal life and character.” Trump tended to be an even greater subject of negative reporting (Patterson 2016). Despite this, he went on to victory.

I argue that the persistent negativity Clinton faced such as being viewed as corrupt, a bad candidate, calculating, power hungry, and so on is where we see gender in the campaign, and this likely affected electoral outcomes. The general wisdom in 2008 was that gender exerted somewhat subtle effects and that sexism did not manifest among primary voters

(Huddy and Carey 2009). Scholars will likely reach this same conclusion as they finished analyzing results from the 2016 primaries and general election. We cannot, however, separate negative perceptions she faced from gender. Given that the public tends to view women as more honest and trustworthy than their male colleagues (Barnes and Beaulieu 2014), continued scrutiny regarding Clinton’s alleged improprieties might have been more devastating than for Trump; as a woman, she risked greater punishment for accusations of wrong doing (see Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2017; Kennedy, McDonnell, and Stephens 2016).

Some argue that Clinton simply ran a bad campaign (Cillizza 2016; Long 2016). She ignored voters in pivotal states and failed to convince disenfranchised working-class men to cast their vote her way. She is also labeled a bad candidate because of the hostility she faced throughout her public career and thus a risky choice for the nomination. While some merit exists to these arguments, they are not gender neutral; the voting behavior of working-class white men and the negative views Clinton endures most certainly is gendered and likely fueled, to some extent, by sexism.

More evidence of overt sexism during the campaign came from Trump himself. Beyond these more explicit statements, he more subtly argued that Clinton lacked the right temperament, image, stamina, and strength to be president (Johnson 2015); women have routinely been subjected to these stereotypes in their bids for the Oval Office. We see male privilege displayed throughout Trump’s candidacy. Trump’s utter lack of preparedness and political experience, the only president to never have prior political or at least military experience (Crockett 2017),<sup>17</sup> was viewed as an asset rather than a liability. His lack of preparedness as well as his tendency to make sexist, racist, and Islamophobic statements led to him being viewed as authentic. Of course, his support among voters might easily be credited to their discontent with the status quo rather than sexism (Newport 2016), but this is too facile. Trump faced some scrutiny regarding inappropriate business dealings, yet these tended not to plague him. Trump’s negative ratings were actually lower than Clinton’s (McCarthy 2016) yet did not damage his candidacy. According to the Gallup Organization, “Both Clinton and Trump had low ratings on honesty and trustworthiness, but Clinton’s image of dishonesty almost certainly hurt her more than Trump’s did him” (Newport 2016). Trump won the race even after the release of recordings bragging about his sexually assaulting women. According to Cillizza (2016), Clinton decided to play it safe believing that “no way, no how would people pick Trump, right?” In all seriousness, however, Clinton had every reason to think that the public would ultimately reject her competition, at least based on the assumption that the more qualified candidate would prove victorious.

<sup>17</sup>According to Crockett (2017), the previous presidents average 13 years in public office and nearly six years of military service.



## Conclusion

Though Clinton won the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes, that she could not secure even more support overall and in key states confirms the difficulty women face gaining the U.S. presidency. Clinton, advantaged by her fundraising, family ties to power, name recognition, party support throughout the election, and vast political qualifications, lost to Trump, an unqualified and deeply flawed candidate. She also ran in a very open political environment in that she did not spar against incumbents on either side of the political aisle and faced little within-party competition for the nomination. I argue that gender, evident in the persistent negativity Clinton faced in media coverage and among the general public, contributed in part to the electoral outcome.

Had Clinton won the 2016 election, it would not have been as revolutionary given her standing as the wife of a former president. Still, it would have finally allowed the United States to join the company of the other 74 countries worldwide that have found a place for women at the executive table. Clinton's defeat signals the continued obstacles of women's presidential pursuits domestically and internationally.

The implications of Clinton's loss include the continued association of men with executive office. Perceptions of presidencies and prime ministerships being synonymous with men may be challenged as women make strides into this male-dominated domain. Seeing women at the helm of the most "masculine" of positions signals that women belong in the political sphere. Their examples may also send broader positive cues, suggesting that politics is more democratic. Women in these positions may even enhance levels of political engagement among the public (see Alexander and Jalalzai 2016). The potential benefits of women's inclusion would only be magnified with a Clinton victory given the high standing that the United States president enjoys on the world stage. Unfortunately, the hardest of glass ceilings remains impenetrable, at least for now.

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### Author Biography

**Farida Jalalzai** is the Hannah Atkins Endowed Chair and Professor of Political Science at Oklahoma State University. Her research analyzes the representation and behavior of women and minorities in politics and the role of gender in the political arena. Her work focuses on women national leaders. Her first book, *Shattered, Cracked and Firmly Intact: Women and the Executive Glass Ceiling Worldwide* (Oxford University Press 2013, updated paperback 2016), offers a comprehensive analysis of women, gender, and national leadership positions. Her second book, *Women Presidents of Latin America: Beyond Family Ties?* (Routledge 2016), examines several case studies of women presidents in Latin America. Her latest book projects include a co-edited volume, *Measuring Women's Political Empowerment Worldwide*, with Amy C. Alexander and Catherine Bolzendahl (Palgrave 2018), and *Senhora Presidenta: Women's Representation in Brazil* during Dilma Rousseff's Presidency with Pedro dos Santos (under contract with Temple University Press).