

A Fork in the Road: Intersectionality and Women's Pathways to Political Power

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Abstract: This investigation explores the pathways to power that women navigate in their pursuit of political office. Drawing from published research studies and public data reports, this historical review examines variations in pathways, election rates, and level of office held (local/state/federal) based on women's unique positions within the matrix of domination, indicating intersections of gender, race, and class when possible. Three research questions guide this study. 1. What are the current levels of representation of women holding political office? 2. What obstacles have been found that hinder women's entry into public service? 3. What are the various pathways that facilitate women's entry into political office? Based on data reviewed, while women's participation in politics has increased, there continues to be a gap in electoral representation, especially among women of color. Pathways to power can be hindered by factors such as media portrayals of female candidates and candidates of color, but may be facilitated through education and/or involvement in activism. Existing research suggests women of color tend to craft less direct pathways to political power, facilitating their entrance through community activism and participation in organizations that advocate social change. Crafting political careers carefully using this experience and leadership, female candidates of color report more confidence in their qualifications for election and ability to lead than their white female counterparts. A higher degree of racial/ethnic identification is demonstrated to produce a higher level of confidence in qualification and ability to lead for female candidates seeking electoral office per the data examined in this study. Conclusions will discuss the need for data about more diverse women.

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