

Edited by  
Susan J. Carroll & Richard L. Fox



# GENDER & ELECTIONS

Shaping the Future of American Politics

THIRD EDITION

AMBRIDGE

# Gender and Elections

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Third Edition

Edited by

**Susan J. Carroll**

Rutgers University

**Richard L. Fox**

Loyola Marymount University



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## GENDER AND ELECTIONS, THIRD EDITION

The third edition of *Gender and Elections* offers a systematic, lively, and multifaceted account of the role of gender in the electoral process through the 2012 elections. This timely yet enduring volume strikes a balance between highlighting the most important developments for women as voters and candidates in the 2012 elections and providing a more long-term, in-depth analysis of the ways that gender has helped shape the contours and outcomes of electoral politics in the United States. Individual chapters demonstrate the importance of gender in understanding and interpreting presidential elections, presidential and vice presidential candidacies, voter participation and turnout, voting choices, congressional elections, the political involvement of Latinas, the participation of African-American women, the support of political parties and women's organizations, candidate communications with voters, and state elections. Without question, *Gender and Elections* is the most comprehensive, reliable, and trustworthy resource on the role of gender in U.S. electoral politics.

Susan J. Carroll is a professor of political science and women's and gender studies at Rutgers University and Senior Scholar at the Center for American Women and Politics of the Eagleton Institute of Politics. She is the author of *Women as Candidates in American Politics* (second edition, 1994), coauthor (with Kira Sanbonmatsu) of *More Women Can Run: Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures* (2013), and editor of *The Impact of Women in Public Office* (2001) and *Women and American Politics: New Questions, New Directions* (2003).

Richard L. Fox is a professor of political science at Loyola Marymount University. His research examines how gender affects voting behavior, state executive elections, congressional elections, and political ambition. He is the author of *Gender Dynamics in Congressional Elections* (1997) and coauthor of *Tabloid Justice: The Criminal Justice System in the Age of Media Frenzy* (second edition, 2007). He is also a coauthor, with Jennifer Lawless, of *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office* (second edition, 2010).

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**Susan J. Carroll** is a professor of political science and women's and gender studies at Rutgers University and senior scholar at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) of the Eagleton Institute of Politics. She is the author of *Women as Candidates in American Politics* (second edition, 1994) and editor of *The Impact of Women in Public Office* (2001) and *Women and American Politics: New Questions, New Directions* (2003). Carroll has published numerous journal articles and book chapters focusing on women candidates, voters, elected officials, and political appointees.

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## Acknowledgments

This volume had its origins in a series of three roundtable panels at professional meetings in 2002 and 2003 focusing on how women fared in the 2002 elections. Most of the contributors to this book were participants at those roundtables. As we gathered at these meetings, we began to talk among ourselves about a major frustration we faced in teaching courses on women and politics, campaigns and elections, and U.S. politics. We all had difficulty finding suitable, up-to-date materials on women candidates, the gender gap, and other facets of women's involvement in elections, and certainly none of us had been able to find a text focused specifically on gender and elections that we could use. We felt the literature was in great need of a recurring and reliable source that would first be published immediately following a presidential election and then updated every four years so that it remained current.

At some point in our discussions we all looked at one another and collectively asked: As the academic experts in this field, aren't we the ones to take on this project? Why don't we produce a volume suitable for classroom use that would also be a resource for scholars, journalists, and practitioners? In that moment *Gender and Elections* was born. We are enormously grateful to Barbara Burrell for organizing the first of our roundtable panels and thus identifying and pulling together the initial core of contributors to this volume.

We produced the first volume of *Gender and Elections* in the immediate aftermath of the 2004 presidential election, and an updated and expanded second edition came out following the elections of 2008. Grati-fied by the positive response, we are pleased to provide this third edition of the volume, which updates it to include information on the 2012 elections. We hope to continue to revise and publish new editions following future presidential elections.



The third edition of this book would not have been possible without the assistance of the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University. Debbie Walsh, director of CAWP, has embraced and encouraged this project and been supportive in numerous ways, especially in making CAWP staff available to assist on the project. Gilda Morales, who is in charge of information services at CAWP, continues to be an invaluable source of knowledge about women and politics, and several contributors relied on her expertise as well as the data she has compiled over the years for CAWP.

While everyone at CAWP was helpful, we want to single out Kathy Kleeman, senior communications officer at CAWP, for assistance above and beyond what we ever could have expected. Kathy, for all three editions, has spent numerous hours making each volume much better than it otherwise would have been. She brought an additional set of critical eyes to the reading of every chapter and, as an extremely skilled writer, helped make all of our chapters more readable, accessible, and polished. We are especially indebted to her.

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## Introduction

### Gender and Electoral Politics in the Twenty-First Century

With unemployment hovering above 8 percent and a burgeoning national debt, the economy was the central policy issue of the 2012 presidential election. But the battle for female voters, attention to “women’s issues,” and the question of which party better understood the needs, values, and experiences of women also garnered substantial attention. Never before had women voters received so much media attention in a general election. A Lexis-Nexis search of major news publications found about three times more mentions of “women voters” in the context of the 2012 presidential election than in any prior election.<sup>1</sup> The attention placed on women voters and “women’s issues” appeared to have a significant influence on the outcome in 2012, an election that featured one of the largest gender gaps ever in presidential voting. Women favored President Obama by a margin of 55 percent to 44 percent, whereas men favored former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney by a margin of 52 percent to 45 percent. The 10-point difference in the proportions of women and men voting for Obama represents the second-largest gender gap in U.S. history, just slightly smaller than the 11 point gender gap in voting for Bill Clinton in 1996.<sup>2</sup>

Gender began to play an important role in the 2012 election long before the final votes were counted. In fact, the Democrats started to characterize the Republicans as engaging in a “war on women” months before Mitt Romney became the official GOP nominee. The “war on women”

<sup>1</sup> The LexisNexis search of “major publications” examined coverage from September 1 through November 15 for every presidential election since 1988. The search terms were “women voters,” “female voters,” and “presidential election.”

<sup>2</sup> Center for American Women and Politics, “Women’s Votes Decisive in 2012 Presidential Race.” Press Release. November 7, 2012. [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/press\\_room/news/documents/PressRelease\\_11-07-12-gendergap.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/press_room/news/documents/PressRelease_11-07-12-gendergap.pdf). Accessed March 25, 2013.

narrative came about and caught hold because of a series of remarks made by prominent Republicans. A prolonged and hotly contested Republican presidential primary race among several strongly conservative candidates who sometimes expressed extreme views provided initial material for the Democrats to exploit, and a series of comments by Republican U.S. Senate and House candidates fueled the “war on women” narrative throughout the fall of 2012.

Perhaps the candidate who posed the strongest primary challenge to Romney was former U.S. senator Rick Santorum. Some of Santorum’s extreme views attracted considerable media attention. Most notably, in an October 2011 interview, Santorum claimed that contraception was “not okay.” Rather, he suggested, “It’s a license to do things in a sexual realm that is counter to how things are supposed to be.”<sup>3</sup> Santorum also criticized “radical feminists” for encouraging women to work outside the home, objected to women serving in combat, and expressed his opposition to abortion in all circumstances – all views that provided Democrats with evidence to support their claim that Republicans were hopelessly out of touch with the needs of women.

Another critical event occurred when talk radio host and conservative icon Rush Limbaugh attacked Georgetown law student Sandra Fluke after she testified at a U.S. House hearing on whether employers should be required to include contraception in their health care coverage. Fluke had argued that employers must cover contraception because its use extends well beyond birth control.<sup>4</sup> Limbaugh’s comments, however, veered from the substance of Fluke’s testimony. On his national radio broadcast, Limbaugh asked:

What does it say about the college co-ed Susan [sic] Fluke, who goes before a congressional committee and essentially says that she must be paid for sex? What does that make her? It makes her a slut, right? It makes her a prostitute.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Shane Vander Hart, Interview with Rick Santorum: A Champion for the Family, Manufacturing Jobs. Caffeinatedthoughts.com. <http://caffeinatedthoughts.com/2011/10/interview-with-rick-santorum-a-champion-for-the-family-manufacturing-jobs/>. Accessed October 19, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Amanda Peterson Beadle, The Testimony About Birth Control Republicans Did Not Want You To Hear. ThinkProgress.org. <http://thinkprogress.org/health/2012/02/16/427417/sandra-fluke-contraception-testimony/>. Accessed February 16, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Mirkinson, Rush Limbaugh: Sandra Fluke, Woman Denied Right To Speak At Contraception Hearing, A “Slut,” HuffingtonPost.com. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/29/rush-limbaugh-sandra-fluke-slut\\_n\\_1311640.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/29/rush-limbaugh-sandra-fluke-slut_n_1311640.html). Accessed February 29, 2012.