

# **Gender and the Misperception of Women's Representation in State Legislatures and Congress**

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# HELP

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**Question: What factors are related to the public's knowledge of gender representation in politics?**

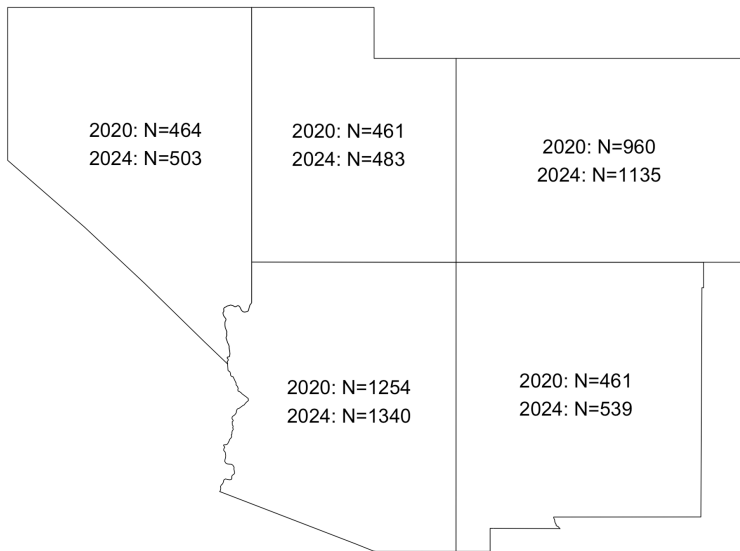
## Two Concepts:

- **Bias**: Over- or underestimating women's representation
  - In general, people tend to overestimate (Sanbonmatsu 2003; Stauffer 2021)
  - Related to age, gender, past representation (Burden and Ono 2021)

## Two Concepts:

- **Bias**: Over- or underestimating women's representation
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  - Related to age, gender, past representation (Burden and Ono 2021)
- **Accuracy**: How “close to the truth” one's belief is
  - People aren't very accurate in general (Sanbonmatsu 2003; Dolan 2011)
  - Women < men on political knowledge (McGlone et al. 2006)
  - Other factors: Age, education, attention to politics, salience

# Western States Survey (2020 and 2024)



## Measures:

“About what percentage of seats in Congress are held by women?”

“About what percentage of seats in your state’s legislature are held by women?”

## Outcomes:

- **Bias:** Respondent’s Estimate - True Value
- **Accuracy:** |Respondent’s Estimate - True Value|

## Predictors:

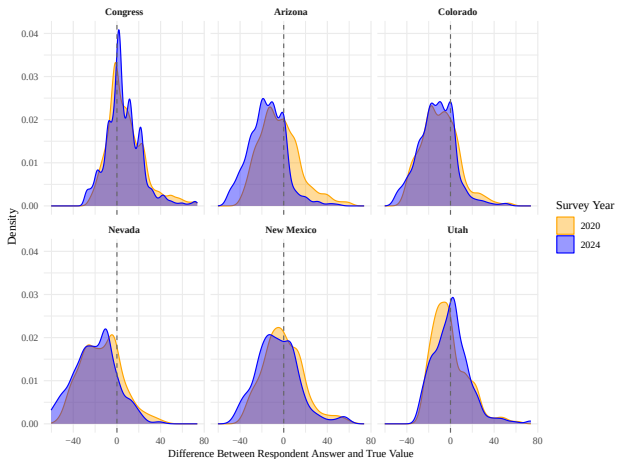
- *Age, Gender, Education*
- *Political Interest, Ideology* (5-point scale), *Party ID* (three-category)
- “How *important* do you think it is that we elect more women to state legislatures?” (3-point scale)
- Indicators for respondent’s *state*

# Women's Representation in our Data

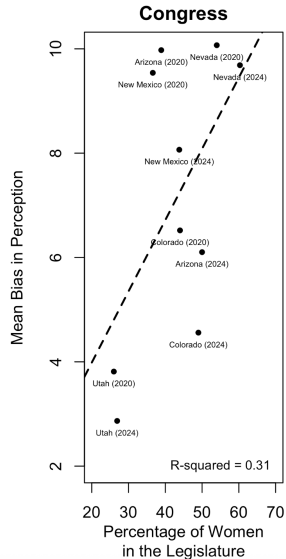
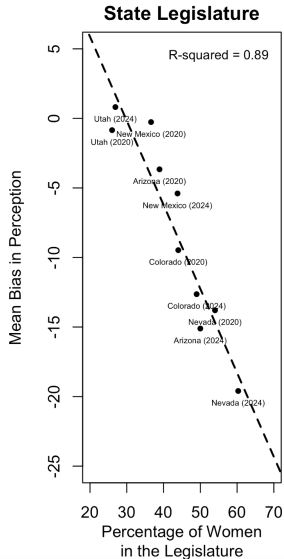
**Table 1: Women's Representation in Congress and State Legislatures, 2020 and 2024**

| <b>State Legislature</b> | <b>2020</b> | <b>2024</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Arizona                  | 38.9%       | 50.0%       |
| Colorado                 | 44.0%       | 49.0%       |
| Nevada                   | 54.0%       | 60.3%       |
| New Mexico               | 36.3%       | 43.8%       |
| Utah                     | 26.0%       | 26.9%       |
| U.S. Congress            | 26.3%       | 28.1%       |

# Bias - State Legislatures + Congress

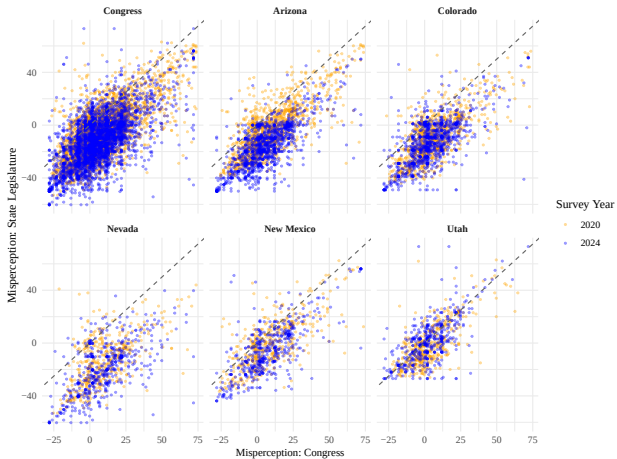


# Bias: Aggregate Patterns





# Bias - State Legislatures vs. Congress



## Model:

- WLS models for the bias in State & Congressional misperceptions, 2020 & 2024 (Respondent's Estimate<sub>i</sub> - True Value<sub>i</sub>)
- $Ns \approx 6100$
- Demographic factors, PID + ideology, political interest, *Importance of Electing Women*, year- and state-specific intercepts

## Results:

- **Importance of Electing Women:** larger bias (in state legislatures); same for Congress but only among men
- **Political Interest:**
  - Congress: Smaller biases in 2020, not in 2024
  - State legislatures: zip, nada
- **Education:** More educated → smaller bias
- **Age:** Curvilinear ("middle age" = smallest bias)
- **Independents** → downward bias
- **Conservatism:** Increases bias among Democrats, decreases it among Independents + Republicans
- **State-Specific** variation

## Part II: (In)Accuracy

Outcome: Absolute value of *Bias* → higher = less accurate

Model:

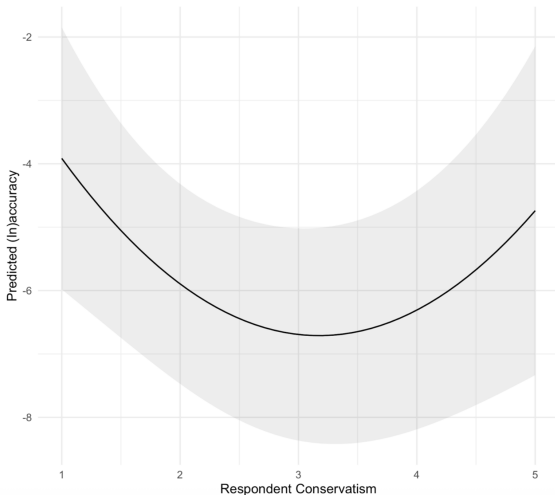
- Similar to Part I
- Added:
  - Quadratic term for *Conservatism*
  - Interaction of *Gender* and *Importance of Electing Women*

Results:

- **Age, Education**: → greater accuracy
- **Independents** → greater accuracy
- **Republicans** → less accuracy (*2020 only*)
- **State-Specific** variation

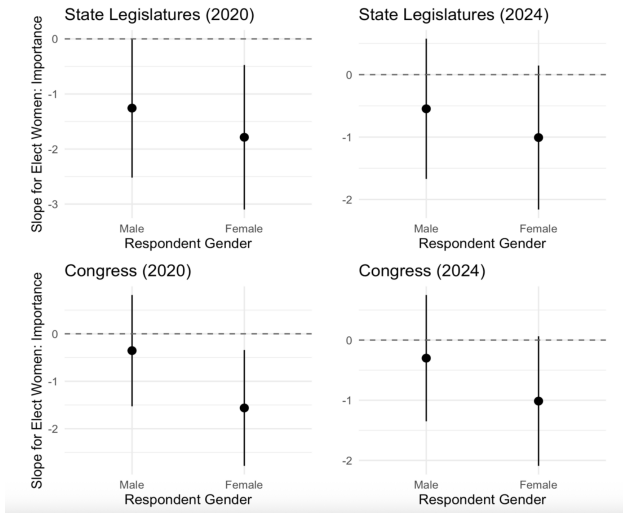
# Ideology and (In)Accuracy

**Figure 3: Predicted Values of Inaccuracy, State Legislatures (2020)**



# (ln)Accuracy - Importance: *Electing Women* and Gender

**Figure 4: Effects of Importance of Electing Women by Outcome, Year, Gender**



# Unanswered Questions / Future Work

## Some ideas:

- Growth of women in state legislatures → more variation
- “Backlash” → measures of “benevolent” and “hostile” sexism (2024 only)
- Impact of bias / inaccuracy on attitudes toward the legislature / Congress
- Longer term: Examine institutions with greater percentages of women (city councils, school boards, etc.)

**Thank you!**

# Bias: WLS Models

|                                | <i>State Legislature</i> | <i>Congress</i> |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Intercept                      | 9.66 (2.90)***           | 22.35 (2.70)*** |
| Political Interest             | -0.89 (0.38)*            | -1.13 (0.36)**  |
| Survey Year (2024)             | -14.23 (1.64)***         | -8.90 (1.53)*** |
| Interest × Year                | 2.93 (0.48)***           | 2.38 (0.45)***  |
| Age                            | -0.38 (0.07)***          | -0.28 (0.07)*** |
| Age Squared                    | 0.00 (0.00)***           | 0.00 (0.00)**   |
| Education                      | -3.64 (0.88)***          | -3.59 (0.82)*** |
| Education Squared              | 0.49 (0.12)***           | 0.40 (0.11)***  |
| Family Income                  | -0.07 (0.07)             | -0.14 (0.07)*   |
| Gender: Woman                  | 0.68 (1.25)              | 2.57 (1.17)*    |
| Elect Women: Important         | -0.86 (0.45)             | -0.22 (0.42)    |
| Woman × Elect Women Importance | -0.69 (0.57)             | -1.16 (0.53)*   |
| Party: Independent             | 0.31 (2.41)              | 2.61 (2.24)     |
| Party: Republican              | 11.31 (1.82)***          | 14.32 (1.69)*** |
| Conservatism × Democratic      | 2.08 (0.35)***           | 2.72 (0.33)***  |
| Conservatism × Independent     | -1.17 (0.81)             | -2.15 (0.76)**  |
| Conservatism × Republican      | -3.55 (0.53)***          | -4.42 (0.49)*** |
| Colorado                       | -0.42 (0.55)             | -1.72 (0.52)*** |
| Nevada                         | -5.89 (0.70)***          | 2.90 (0.65)***  |
| New Mexico                     | 6.58 (0.76)***           | 0.50 (0.71)     |
| Utah                           | 10.23 (0.70)***          | -4.50 (0.66)*** |
| R <sup>2</sup>                 | 0.12                     | 0.07            |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup>            | 0.12                     | 0.06            |
| Num. obs.                      | 6126                     | 6124            |

Note: Cell entries are WLS estimates; standard errors are in parentheses. See text for details.  
Asterisks indicate significance: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .



# Inaccuracy: WLS Models

|                                | <i>State Legislature</i> | <i>Congress</i> |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Intercept                      | 10.67 (2.00)***          | 21.12 (2.06)*** |
| Political Interest             | -0.19 (0.27)             | -0.97 (0.27)*** |
| Survey Year (2024)             | 2.13 (1.14)              | -5.17 (1.17)*** |
| Political Interest × Year      | -0.25 (0.33)             | 1.39 (0.35)***  |
| Age                            | 0.06 (0.05)              | -0.16 (0.05)**  |
| Age Squared                    | -0.01 (0.00)             | 0.00 (0.00)     |
| Education                      | 0.67 (0.61)              | -1.85 (0.62)**  |
| Education Squared              | -0.19 (0.08)*            | 0.15 (0.08)     |
| Family Income                  | -0.09 (0.05)             | -0.24 (0.05)*** |
| Gender: Woman                  | 1.59 (0.87)              | 1.62 (0.89)     |
| Elect Women: Important         | 1.87 (0.31)***           | 0.87 (0.32)**   |
| Woman × Elect Women Importance | -0.38 (0.39)             | -0.87 (0.40)*   |
| Party: Independent             | 6.05 (1.66)***           | 4.35 (1.71)*    |
| Party: Republican              | 2.39 (1.25)              | 10.75 (1.29)*** |
| Conservatism × Democratic      | 0.58 (0.24)*             | 2.30 (0.25)***  |
| Conservatism × Independent     | -1.51 (0.56)**           | -2.35 (0.58)*** |
| Conservatism × Republican      | -0.81 (0.36)*            | -3.54 (0.38)*** |
| Colorado                       | -0.65 (0.38)             | -1.13 (0.40)**  |
| Nevada                         | 3.56 (0.48)***           | 1.78 (0.50)***  |
| New Mexico                     | -2.16 (0.52)***          | 0.48 (0.54)     |
| Utah                           | -4.22 (0.49)***          | -2.68 (0.50)*** |
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