



Republican Women Serving in State Legislatures

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Introduction

In an article published by *The Atlantic*, Karyn Bruggeman asserts that “if women are going to achieve parity in elective office, most of the gains will have to come from the GOP.”¹ Unfortunately, Bruggeman’s statement is all too true. While Democrat women have made consistent gains in elected offices at the state and national levels of government, Republican female representation has continued to dwindle, particularly in state legislatures. In fact, the percentage of Republican women serving in state legislatures is the same today as when it last peaked in 1995 at 9%. At that time, the percentage of female Democrats serving was 11%. Today, however, Democrat women make up nearly 20% of all state legislatures—Republican representation has not changed in a quarter century.

Most of the literature and rhetoric surrounding female candidacy and representation puts both Republican and Democrat women in the same category, treating them as if they experience candidacy and the decision to run in the same way—though this is certainly not the case. This paper will identify and discuss key factors that affect Republican female candidacy both positively and negatively. In addition, this paper highlights Utah’s unique challenges and makes recommendations to increase the number of Republican women running and serving in the state legislature. The information presented in the research is critical to understanding because both progressive *and* conservative voices of women in Utah and beyond are necessary to the policy making process in working towards a more representative and responsive form of government. This paper was originally completed in May 2019 as the author’s thesis for a Master’s of Public Administration at the University of Utah. Some of the literature has been updated.

Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the current and historical status of female representation in state legislatures and works to pinpoint the influential factors identified in the literature that contribute both positively and negatively to Republican female representation in state legislatures. The factors that will be discussed at length are party affiliation (ideology, realignment, polarization, membership), national and state party recruitment, structure of legislatures, term limits, and national focus on international security issues versus domestic issues.

National Overview: A 2014 study cataloged the percentage of women Democrat and Republican legislators from 1981 to 2014, Elder found that in ten states, women made up 40% or more of Democratic legislators, while the percentage of female Republicans declined in nine states and made no progress in three other states.² Democratic women increased their representation among Democrat legislators in every state. Elder asserts, “these results rebut the notion that increases in women’s representation will happen slowly but surely.”³ In 2014, Democrats were outnumbered by Republicans in state legislatures, with 53.4% of all legislators being Republican. Interestingly, though, Democratic female legislators outnumber

¹ Bruggeman, K. (2015, January 15). Want more women in office? Look to Republicans. *The Atlantic*.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/01/want-more-women-in-office-look-to-republicans/384565/>

² Elder, L. (2014). Contrasting party dynamics: a three-decade analysis of the representation of Democratic versus Republican women state legislators. *The Social Science Journal*, 51(3), 377–385.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2014.05.004>

³ Ibid, p. 381.

female Republican legislators 2:1.⁴ That ratio remains the same today, with 1,453 Democrat women and just 671 Republican women serving in state legislatures.⁵

A Closer Look at Utah: The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) reported in Utah in 2020, of the 104 legislators, 26 females served in the House and the Senate, comprising 25% of the state legislative body.⁶ Utah has never had so many women serving in the state legislature at one time in its history; yet even after making significant strides, Utah is ranked 34th in the nation for female representation. Utah is a strongly conservative red state, and one might think that the majority of the women serving are Republicans—not so. Even with Republicans having a super majority in the House and Senate, only 9.6% of Utah Republican legislators are female (10/104). The largest percentage of Republican women legislators serving at one time was in 2003 at 12.5%.⁷

Party Affiliation: Ideology, Realignment, Polarization, and Membership: In news and public discussions on women in politics, female candidates are often referred to generally, regardless of party affiliation. The literature is clear, however, that party affiliation plays a significant role and that Republican and Democrat women have very different experiences, challenges, and factors that contribute to their success as candidates and elected officials. In her work on political parties and recruitment, Sanbonmatsu⁸ explains that research demonstrates the need to “disaggregate women by party in order to understand the pattern of where women run for and hold state legislative office”⁹ to determine the factors that shape female candidacies differently based on party. Currently red states, those with more Republican electorates, tend to have fewer women in state legislatures¹⁰, a trend that has flipped since the 1970s and 1980s, when blue or Democratic electorates had fewer women serving in state legislatures¹¹; this was no longer the case after the 1990s.¹² Interestingly, the close of the 1980s was right around the time the Christian Right movement campaigned hard in Republican state parties, encouraging a more conservative agenda highlighting the importance of traditional values in the family and gender roles.¹³ Both parties underwent major realignment regarding the role of mothers and women. In the divergence, the Democratic Party increased in the number of feminists, and the Republican Party increased the number of religious conservatives who argued for traditional gender roles.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that that both parties saw an increase in female representation through the 1980s and 1990s. After the turn of the century and post-9/11, when there became an increased focus on terrorism and the conversation shifted

⁴ Carroll, S. J. (2014). Women in state government: Stalled progress. *The book of the states 2014*. The Council of State Governments. http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/system/files/Women_0.pdf

⁵ CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (2020). Current Numbers. *Institute of Politics, Rutgers University*. <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/current-numbers>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (1999–2019). Fact sheet archives. *Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University*. <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg2003.pdf>

⁸ Sanbonmatsu, K. (2002). Political parties and the recruitment of women to state legislatures. *The Journal of Politics*, 64(3), 791–809. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-3816.00146>

⁹ Ibid, p. 805.

¹⁰ Arceneaux, K. (2001). The “gender gap” in state legislative representation: New data to tackle an old question. *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(1), 143–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290105400108>; CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (1999–2019). Fact sheet archives. *Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University*.

¹¹ Diamond, I. (1977). *Sex roles in the state house*. Yale University Press.

¹² Rule, W. (1999). Why are more women state legislators? In L. D. Whitaker (Ed.), *Women in politics: Outsiders or insiders?* (3rd ed., pp. 190–202). Prentice Hall.

¹³ Green, J. C., Guth, J. L., & Wilcox, C. (1998). Less than conquerors: The Christian Right in state Republican parties. In A. N. Costain, & A. S. McFarland (Eds.), *Social Movements and American Political Institutions* (pp. 117–135). Rowman & Littlefield; Wolbrecht, C. (2000). *The politics of women’s rights: Parties, positions, and change*. Princeton University Press.

¹⁴ Elder, L., & Greene, S. (2012). *The politics of parenthood: Causes and consequences of the politicization and polarization of the American family*. SUNY Press.

from domestic issues to international ones, Republican women felt the dampening effects of the conversation shift as the country's focus switched to fighting terrorism.¹⁵

Both parties have become increasingly polarized ideologically, with more and more Republicans identifying as strongly conservative, while Democrats identify more as being strongly liberal.¹⁶ Examples include the conservative Tea Party Movement, which began in 2009, and, for progressives, the popularity of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaigns. The polarization is important to note, as Thomsen¹⁷ points out that many moderate Republicans—a group that includes a disproportionate number of women—are less likely to feel like they fit the party and to consider running for office. In addition, studies have shown that in extremely conservative states Republican women may have a more difficult time gaining support as it is assumed that they are far too liberal.¹⁸ More recently, political scientists have found that in primary races, Republican voters are more likely to assume that men are more conservative than their counterpart female candidates and would vote accordingly. Interestingly, Democrats are actually *more* likely to vote for a female candidate based on the assumption that she will be more liberal than her male counterpart.¹⁹

When reviewing party identification and voter alignment, it is helpful to review voting trends in presidential elections. For the past two decades, the majority of women have voted for Democrat candidates—with the size of the majority varying, election by election. Ronald Reagan was the last Republican to receive a greater percentage of female votes than his Democrat challengers. In the 2016 presidential election, President Donald J. Trump received votes from 53% of men and 42% of women, while Hillary Clinton received 41% of votes from men and 54% from women.²⁰ The average percentage of women who have voted for a Republican presidential nominee since 1980 is 45%, much higher than initially anticipated, considering the national rhetoric surrounding women and party affiliation. The complete data of voting trends from 1980 to 2016 can be seen in Figure 1. After the most recent presidential election (Donald Trump (R) v. Hillary Clinton (D)), the Pew Research Center reported that just 38% of women said they are or lean Republican.²¹ It is interesting to note that in 2018, 37.1% of all Republican state legislators in the United States were women, just .9% lower than the percentage of women identifying as Republicans nationally.²²

¹⁵ Elder, L. (2014). Contrasting party dynamics: a three-decade analysis of the representation of Democratic versus Republican women state legislators. *The Social Science Journal*, 51(3), 377–385.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2014.05.004>; Paxton, P., Painter, M. A., II, & Hughes, M. M. (2009). Year of the woman, decade of the man: Trajectories of growth in women's state legislative representation. *Social Science Research*, 38(1), 86–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2008.08.003>

¹⁶ Hacker, J. S., & Pierson, P. (2005). Abandoning the middle: The Bush tax cuts and the limits of democratic control. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(1), 33–53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759270505048>

¹⁷ Thomsen, D. M. (2014). Ideological moderates won't run: How party fit matters for partisan polarization in congress. *Journal of Politics*, 76(3), 786–797. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381614000243>

¹⁸ King, D. C., & Matland, R. E. (2003). Sex and the grand old party: An experimental investigation of the effect of candidate sex on support for a Republican candidate. *American Politics Research*, 31(6), 595–612.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X03255286>; Sanbonmatsu, K., & Dolan, K. (2009). Do gender stereotypes transcend party? *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(3), 485–494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912908322416>

¹⁹ Norwood, C. (2019, May 28). Republican women watch their numbers decline in state legislatures. *Governing: The Future of States and Localities*. <https://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-gop-women-state-legislatures-rutgers-republican-female-lawmakers.html>

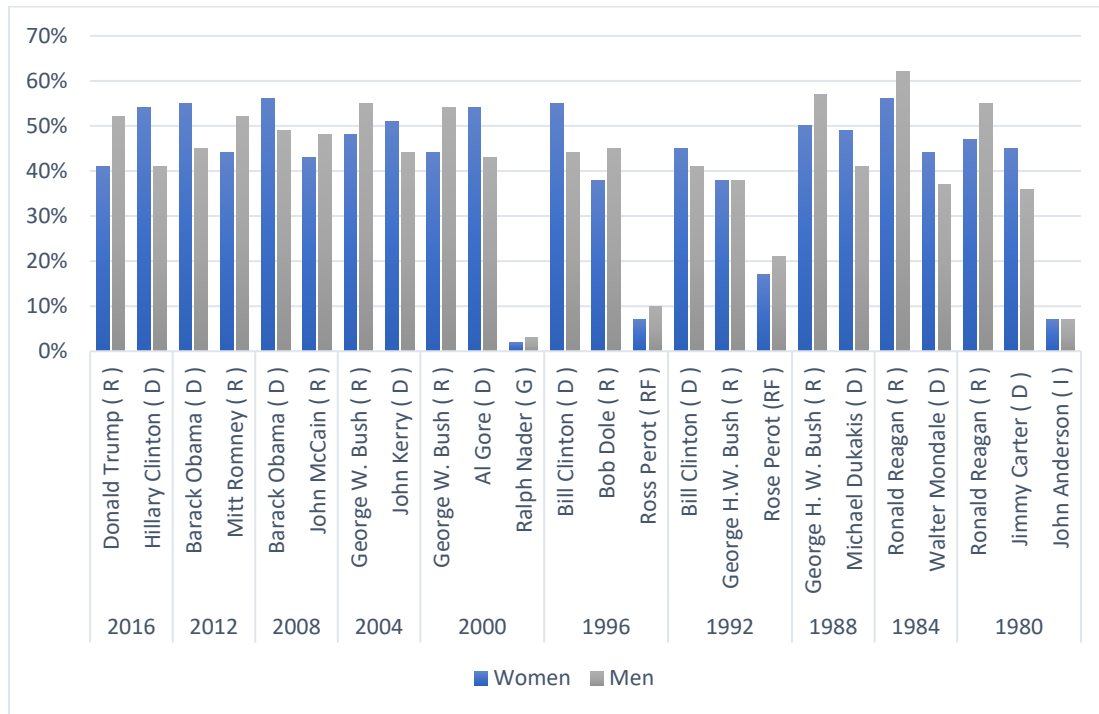
²⁰ CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (2017). The gender gap: Voting choices in presidential elections. *Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University*.

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/ggpresvote.pdf>

²¹ Pew Research Center. (2016, September 13). Party affiliation among voters: 1992–2016. <http://www.people-press.org/2016/09/13/2-party-affiliation-among-voters-1992-2016/>

²² CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (2018). Women in state legislatures, 2018. *Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University*. <http://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-state-legislature-2018>

**Figure 1: Voting in Presidential Elections by Gender
1980–2016**



Source: Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP, 2017). The gender gap: Voting choices in presidential elections.

Recruitment: In the first study of its kind, surveying the largest and collecting the most detailed experiences on potential candidates and their recruitment, Fox and Lawless²³ found that across the board, both Republican and Democrat women are less likely than their male counterparts to be recruited to run for elected office by party leadership. With that in mind, though, Fox and Lawless asserted that the “prospects for gender parity in electoral institutions are particularly bleak for Republicans” as there were fewer Republican women in the opportunity pool or “candidate eligibility pool” than Democrats.²⁴ In addition, they found that women’s organizations focus on recruiting progressive women, decreasing the severity of the recruiting discrepancy between male and female Democrat candidates. Epstein et al.²⁵ found that this is consistent even for independent women groups whose mission is bipartisan; their organizations focus on recruiting progressive women rather than conservative women. Burrell²⁶ notes that political parties are important resources for candidates, especially those who are new to the political arena.

²³ Fox, R. L., & Lawless, J. L. (2010). If only they’d ask: Gender, recruitment, and political ambition. *The Journal of Politics*, 72(2), 310–326. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381609990752>

²⁴ Ibid, p. 322.

²⁵ Epstein, M. J., Niemi, R. G., & Powell, L. W. (2005). Do women and men state legislators differ? In S. Thomas & C. Wilcox (Eds.), *Women and elective office: Past, present, and future* (2nd ed., pp. 94–109). Oxford University Press.

²⁶ Burrell, B. (2010). Political parties and women’s organizations: Bringing women into the electoral arena. In S. J. Carroll, & R. L. Fox (Eds.), *Gender and elections: Shaping the future of American politics* (2nd ed., pp. 210–238). Cambridge University Press.

Fox and Lawless concluded that unless the Republican party makes a priority of actively recruiting female candidates, the gender disparity between the two parties will continue to increase.²⁷ Two studies done by Sanbonmatsu²⁸ and Bradshaw and Cooperman²⁹ reviewed the strategic operations, candidate resources, and party-candidate relationships of multiple GOP state party organizations. Sanbonmatsu also conducted personal interviews with Republican party leaders in the states she studied. Both studies found that there was no effort made to recruit female candidates to run for office, and, in many cases, the party explained there was no need to focus on recruiting women.

Building on the importance of recruitment, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP)³⁰ did a national study in 2008 of all state legislators. CAWP's data showed that 43% of male legislators said running for elective office was their own idea, with just 26% of female legislators stating the same. Interestingly though 53% of female legislators had not thought about running for elected office until it was suggested by someone else, compared with just 28% of their male colleagues. Data like these demonstrate that to increase the number of women running—particularly Republican women—party leaders, elected officials, and organizations need to actively recruit female candidates for elected office. Discussing the need for Republicans to work harder than Democrats to recruit female candidates, Laurel Elder asserts, “If the Republican party has any desire to slow the future growth of the partisan gap, let alone close the gap, it will need to adopt dramatically new recruitment strategies to proactively attract women candidates at both the state and national level.”³¹

Throughout the literature, researchers discuss the “political pipeline” or “opportunity pool,” essentially the bench from which parties, open seats, and contested races draw capable candidates. Discussing this pipeline and its influence on the number of women serving in elected office from the local level to Congress, Carroll³² asks the poignant question, “What if the pool of female candidates in statewide and state legislative offices continues to stagnate or decline?” She responds, “The number of politically experienced women with the visibility and contacts necessary to run for governor or a seat in the U.S. House or Senate also is likely to stagnate or decline.”³³

Structure of State Legislatures: In addition to these factors affecting Republican female candidates, Sanbonmatsu³⁴ found that the length of the session and level of professionalism in the legislature can affect the representation of female legislators differently by party. Interestingly, the length of a legislative session negatively impacted female representation amongst Democrats—likely because many Democrat women candidates are coming from the workforce as opposed to those of the Republican party, who are more likely to be homemakers when elected to office.³⁵ That said, when there are more women in the political pipeline or candidate eligibility pool, it is generally measured by the presence of women in the workforce in the state—today, 57.1% of women are engaged in the workforce.³⁶ Women in

²⁷ Fox, R. L., & Lawless, J. L. (2010). If only they'd ask: Gender, recruitment, and political ambition. *The Journal of Politics*, 72(2), 310–326. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381609990752>

²⁸ Sanbonmatsu, K. (2002). Political parties and the recruitment of women to state legislatures. *The Journal of Politics*, 64(3), 791–809. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-3816.00146>

²⁹ Bradshaw, S., & Cooperman, R. (2011). Where are the women? Women as candidates in the Republican party of Virginia. *Virginia Social Science Journal*, 46, 19–38.

³⁰ CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (2008). Women in State Legislatures 2008. *Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University*. <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg2008.pdf>

³¹ Elder, L. (2008). Whither Republican women: The growing partisan gap among women in Congress. *The Forum*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.2202/1540-8884.1204> (p. 15).

³² Carroll, S. J. (2014). Women in state government: Stalled progress. *The book of the states 2014*. The Council of State Governments. http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/kc/system/files/Women_0.pdf

³³ *Ibid*, p. 417.

³⁴ Sanbonmatsu, K. (2002). Political parties and the recruitment of women to state legislatures. *The Journal of Politics*, 64(3), 791–809. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-3816.00146>

³⁵ *Ibid*.

³⁶ Arceneaux, K. (2001). The “gender gap” in state legislative representation: New data to tackle an old question. *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(1), 143–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290105400108>; Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2018). Labor force statistics from the current population survey. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat03.htm>

both parties are also affected negatively when state legislators are highly professional and are compensated well, attracting increased competition.³⁷

Term Limits: Several studies have been done reviewing the impact of term limits on the representation of women in state legislatures. Sanbonmatsu³⁸ points out that term limits increase the turnover right and has a mixed effect on women as the competition increases. Karp³⁹ argues that implementing term limits would open a larger number of seats and help reduce the lasting effects of incumbency and dramatically increase female representation in both state legislatures and Congress. However, Bernstein and Chadha⁴⁰ found that the increase of open seats caused by term limits had a negative impact on female representation.

Working to bridge the differing results from the studies conducted, Pettey⁴¹ conducted a state-by-state analysis of term limits and their impact on female candidates. Her in-depth analysis points out that the incumbency advantage that creates high re-election rates for incumbents leaves very little opportunity for new candidates. In addition, Pettey asserts that the eligibility pool is much smaller for females than for males because the majority of candidates come from the business and law sectors. Regarding open seats, if more offices are opening, statistically, the number of female candidates would need to increase to match the increased seats available. Pettey found that term limits do in fact increase the average amount of women candidates running for office in the states and do affect women of both parties positively. Pettey made the distinction that in states with term limits, the Democrat candidate emergence rates increase by 2%, while Republican female candidate emergence rates increase by 1.5%. Ultimately, term limits change the candidacy pool and reduce the effects of the incumbency advantage.⁴²

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The party-based data divergence suggests that increasing the number of female Republican women serving in state legislatures requires sole focus on their numbers. Given the discussion surrounding women engagement in the political process, it is hypothesized that Republican women will follow a similar trend line parallel to their Democrat counterparts at lower percentages of representation in state legislatures. Other questions arise: Are any red states excelling in terms of Republican women serving in state legislatures? How do the numbers compare with those of their Democrat counterparts? What do the literature and data indicate about the best ways to encourage more Republican women to serve in state legislatures?

Methods

For the quantitative portion of this paper, the author collected data from the archives of the CAWP from the past two decades (1999–2019) of all states⁴³—gathering data on each state’s ranking in terms of female representation, the number of female Democrats and Republicans serving in either the state house or the senate, and the total number of legislators (both male and female) in the body as a whole. The data

³⁷ Norrander, B., & Wilcox, C. (2005). Change in continuity in the geography of women state legislatures. In S. Thomas, & C. Wilcox (Eds.), *Women and elective office: Past, present and future* (2nd ed., pp. 176–196). Oxford University Press.

³⁸ Sanbonmatsu, K. (2002). Political parties and the recruitment of women to state legislatures. *The Journal of Politics*, 64(3), 791–809. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-3816.00146>

³⁹ Karp, J. A. (1995). Explaining public support for legislative term limits. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 59(3), 373–391. <https://doi.org/10.1086/269482>

⁴⁰ Bernstein, R. A., & Chadha, A. (2003). The effects of term limits on representation: Why so few women? In R. Farmer, J. D. Rausch, Jr., & J. C. Green (Eds.), *The test of time: Coping with legislative term limits* (pp. 147–58). Lexington Books.

⁴¹ Pettey, S. (2018). Female candidate emergence and term limits: A state-level analysis. *Political Research Quarterly*, 71(2), 318–329.

⁴² Ibid.

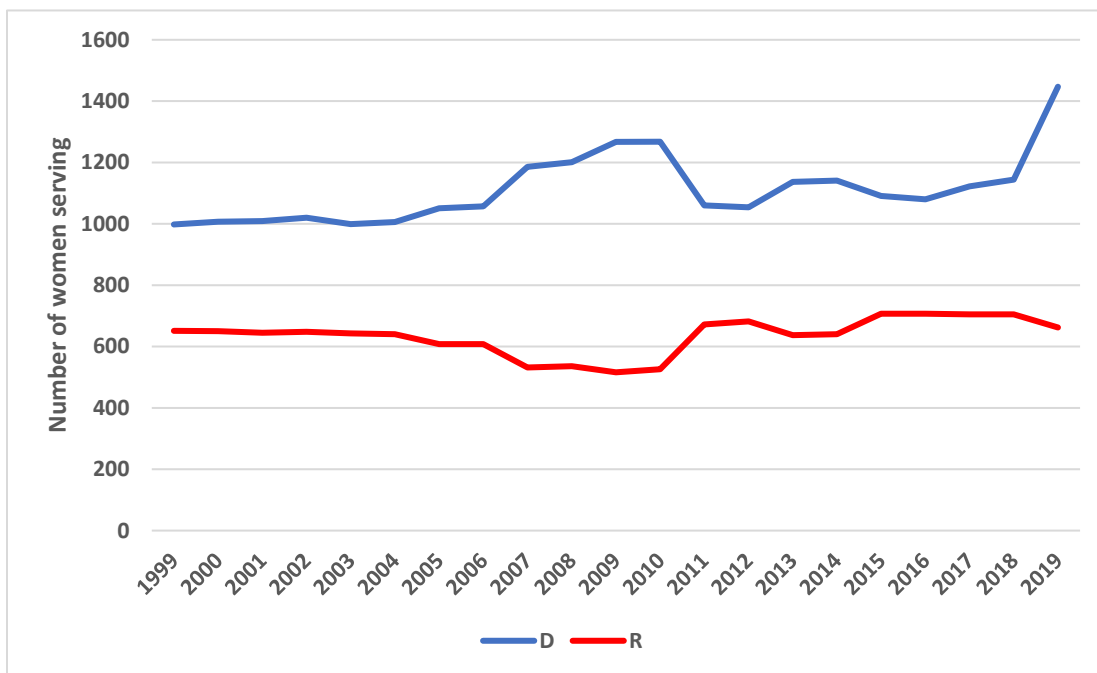
⁴³ CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (1999–2019). Fact sheet archives. *Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University* (see links in appendix).

were analyzed to address the following: 1) the number of Republican women serving paralleled with the number of Democrat women serving; 2) the 20-year trend in historically red states versus blue states juxtaposed with the national trend line of women serving; 3) an analysis of historically red states in 2019 and which of those states' legislatures have 15% or more of Republican women serving in their legislative bodies.

Results

Republican and Democrat Women: Republican and Democrat women are often clumped into one gendered category—with the assumption that success regardless of party lines, meant success for all. The data show that this is not the case in terms of increased candidacy across the board. Rather than the percentages of Democrat and Republican women serving in state legislatures increasing and declining parallel to one another, they are the inverse of one another (see Figure 2 below). As the number of female Democrat legislators increases, particularly on large peaks, the number of female Republican legislators decreases, and vice versa. The contrast is particularly stark between 2006 and 2015. Most recently, in 2019, the number of Democrat female state legislators soared, while Republican women declined.

**Figure 2: Female State Legislators—Democrats v. Republicans
1999–2019**



Source: Graph created by data collected from the Center for American Women and Politics (1999–2019) Fact Sheet Archive.

The fluctuations of both parties have a myriad of factors, but the strongest connection is national politics: congressional midterms and presidential elections. In 2006, the rise of female Democrat state legislators jumped in the same year that Democrats took control of both the House and Senate in Congress for the first time since 1994⁴⁴; two years later, President Barack H. Obama was elected. Just four years later, the Tea Party tidal wave reclaimed the House and the Senate for Republicans in Congress, and the number of female Republican elected to state legislatures jumping significantly.⁴⁵ In addition to the national political temperature, the health of the economy, national crises, and state politics all affect candidacies. The case

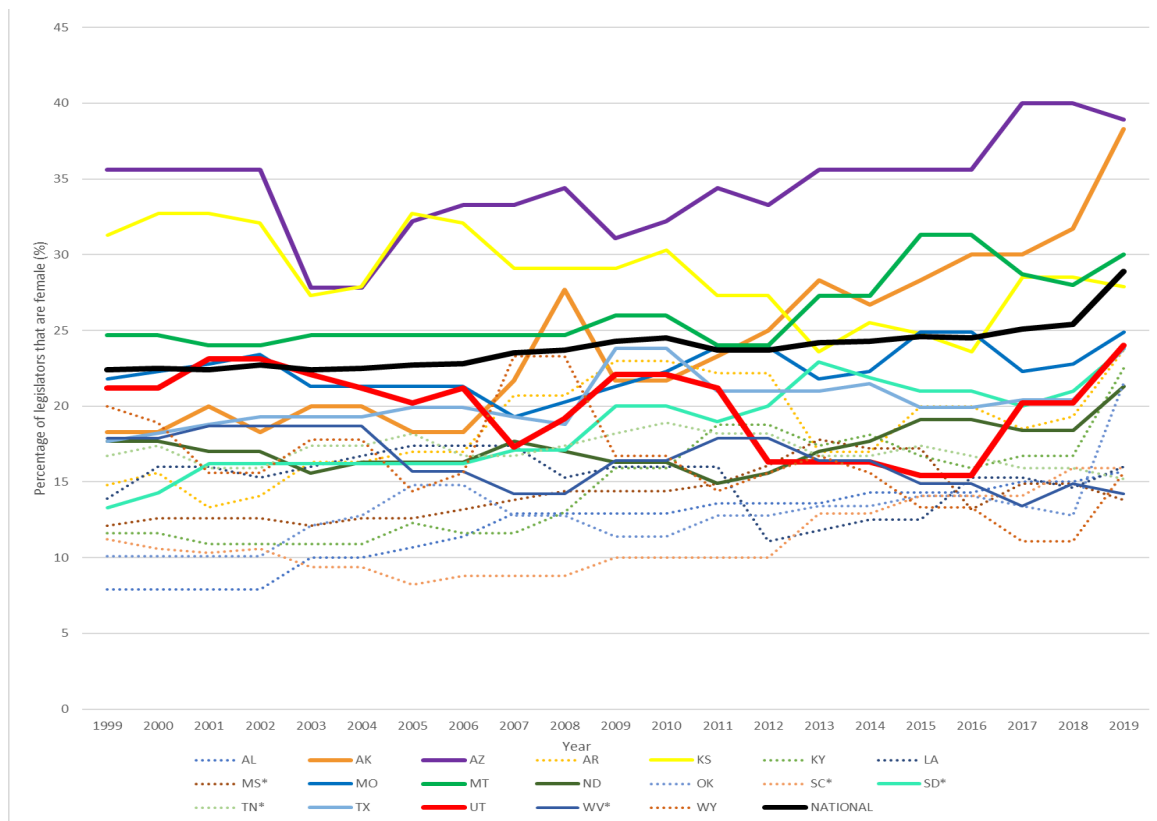
⁴⁴ CNN. (2006). Democrats retake Congress. *CNN: Americavotes2006*. <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/>

⁴⁵ Vogel, K. P. (2010, November 3). Tea party eyes GOP with suspicion. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.com/story/2010/11/tea-party-eyes-gop-with-suspicion-044625>

for separating the data regarding women conservative and liberal candidates is also rooted in the values, priorities, and perspectives that are guided by their ideological view. Women from both sides are disparately influenced by the national political climate and elected by voters with differing opinions on the role of government and the partisan divide.

Red States—Trouble Getting above the National Trend Line: Data were collected regarding states that have historically voted Republican in presidential elections, specifically on conservative female representation in their state legislative bodies. These states included Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.⁴⁶ Three red states have female representation in state legislatures that is above the national trend line (see Figure 3). The thick black line represents the national trend line, with Arizona (purple), Montana (green), and Alaska (orange) above the national average. In 2019, 38.3% of Alaskan state legislators were women; of that, 26.7% are Republican—the highest percentage of Republican women serving in any state legislature. In addition, only five of the 22 red states have 15% or more Republican women state legislators: Alaska (26.7%), Idaho (21%), South Dakota (18.1%), Arizona (15.6%), and Arkansas (15.6%). Another red state that has made significant progress and has been on a continuous upward trend is South Dakota (turquoise).

Figure 3: Female Legislators by Percentage in Historically Red States, 1999–2019



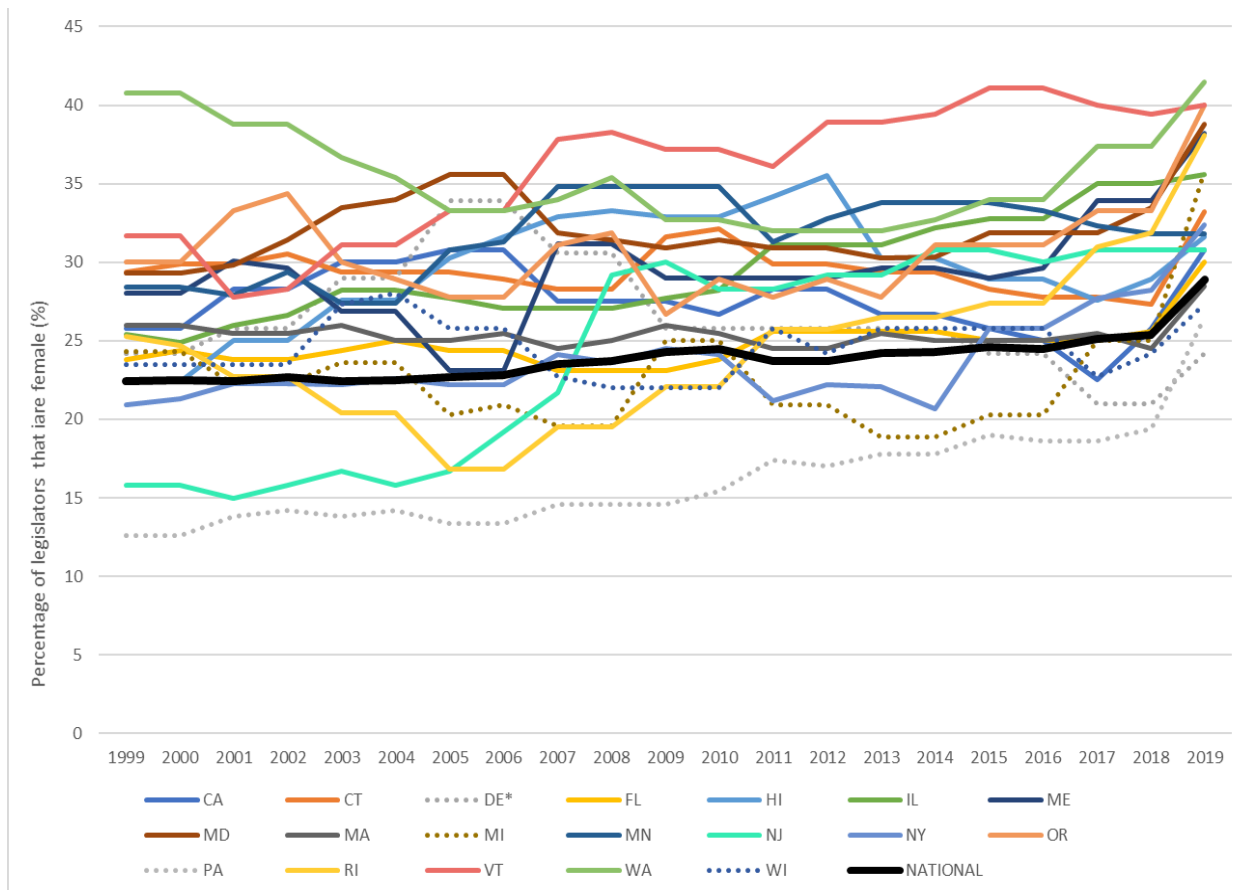
Source: Created with data collected from the Center for American Women and Politics (1999–2019) Fact Sheet Archive

⁴⁶ Pariona, A. (2019, March 25). List of Red States (Republican States). *World Atlas*. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/states-that-have-voted-republican-in-the-most-consecutive-u-s-presidential-elections.html>

Figure 3 shows Utah’s trend (thick red line). The percentage of women serving in the state legislature was above the national trend line briefly from 2001–2003 before it began declining and has not since surpassed the national percentage. When reviewing the data for the state’s legislature, it is hard to imagine that Utah was the first state to give women the right to vote and has a deep women’s history engrained in the suffrage movement.⁴⁷ In its 123 years of statehood, Utah has had only four women serve as members of Congress, half of whom served one term, and the other half serving two terms. No female has served in the United States Senate.

The graph of red states is almost the inverse of historically blue states and their comparison with the national trend line (see Figure 4). In the case of blue states, the majority of state legislatures have more women serving above the national trend line.

**Figure 4: Blue States—Female Legislators
1999–2019**



Source: Created with data collected from the Center for American Women and Politics (1999-2019) Fact Sheet Archive

A review of the five red states having 15% or more Republican women in state legislatures showed that all of the legislatures were in session between January and May. Three of the five states had term limits.⁴⁸ One state, Alaska, has many organizations specifically for Republican women, such as Anchorage Republicans Women Club, Midnight Sun Republican Women, Republican Women of Juneau, Alaska Federation of Republican Women, and Republican Women of Fairbanks. Alaskan non-partisan

⁴⁷ Haddock, M. (2010, February 8). Utah women voted earlier than most in U.S. *Deseret News*. <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/700008024/Utah-women-voted-earlier-than-most-in-US.html>

⁴⁸ National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL). (2019). 2019 State legislative calendar. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/2019-state-legislative-session-calendar.aspx>

organizations having a mission to increase female participation in the political process and promote women running for office include Alaska NOW, Alaska Women for Political Action, and Leadership Anchorage.⁴⁹

Recommendations Moving Forward

Given the data, a number of measures are recommended to increase the number of Republican women serving in state legislatures both nationally and in Utah.

1. ACKNOWLEDGE THE STATUS QUO

According to Pew Research Center, only 33% of Republican or Republican-leaning survey participants believed that females are underrepresented in elected positions, compared with 79% of Democrats surveyed who felt that women were underrepresented in political office.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the data show that Republican women are sparse and underrepresented in many state legislatures, while the number of female Democrats is steadily increasing. Conservatives often argue that candidates elected for office should be judged by merit alone, not by race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. This paper does not refute that; however, it would be disingenuous to ignore the data and the reality that women in general are more likely to run if they are encouraged or recruited to run. There are many qualified and capable Republican women who, based on their own merits, can succeed in running for elected office—without enforced quotas. They need only to be asked, encouraged, and made aware of the available resources. Acknowledging this balance, Political Parity quoted a state GOP leader, who is a woman, in saying, “We would benefit by having more women in office, especially in the legislature at the state and federal levels, for the different perspectives they bring.... If they’re as qualified or more qualified, we should be promoting women.”⁵¹ The Republican party at the county, state, and national levels should acknowledge this is the current reality and work to make the needed structural, programmatic, and resource changes to empower conservative women.

2. ORGANIZE AND MOBILIZE: GOP OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

Republican and Democrat female candidates should not be lumped into one category. This practice enforces the stereotype that all women think alike and neglects to acknowledge the ideological, demographic, structural, and partisan differences that exist between the parties and their candidates. To increase the number of female Republicans, party leaders, legislative leadership, incumbents, and PACs should work to create organizations, and programs with missions dedicated to targeting conservative women.

Fundraising and Training: The research shows that gender is not of concern to key donors and that incumbency is one of the strongest reasons for campaign giving. That said, Political Parity’s report, *Right the Ratio*, asserted that Republican women candidates do in fact have a more difficult time raising money, largely due to “fragmented sources of support.”⁵² Interestingly, after reviewing campaign finance data from the Federal Election Commission, Political Parity found that, in general, male and female candidates receive very little money directly from the party, and PAC money is typically unavailable until a candidate becomes the actual party nominee. In review of this, the *Right the Ratio* report asserted: “This presents a paradox: without money, female GOP candidates struggle to win their primaries, but they

⁴⁹ CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (2019). Women’s political power map. *Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University*. <https://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/education/leadership-resources?state=198>

⁵⁰ Norwood, C. (2019, May 28). Republican women watch their numbers decline in state legislatures. *Governing: The Future of States and Localities*. <https://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-gop-women-state-legislatures-rutgers-republican-female-lawmakers.html>

⁵¹ Shames, S. (2015). Right the ratio. *Political Parity*. <http://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/primary-hurdles-full-report.pdf>, p. 6.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 3.

generally don't receive much party money until they do.”⁵³ With this information in mind, party leadership should help with the creation of PACs and organizations with the purpose of supporting conservative women candidates from start-to-finish of their campaign. The party can maintain neutrality until a candidate is the nominee, while having the resources they can refer conservative women to during primary races.

When Republican donors were surveyed on PACs set up specifically for conservative women, 72% of them had never heard of them; while 93% of their Democrat counterparts were aware, familiar, and giving to PACs set up for progressive women.⁵⁴ This is one area where Republicans are struggling to catch up with their Democrat counterparts. EMILY's List⁵⁵ is an incredibly robust and prominent PAC that was created in 1985 to help fund campaigns of pro-choice Democrat women. Interestingly, the acronym “EMILY” stands for “Early Money Is Like Yeast”; as an organization they have raised over \$600 million for candidates, trained 9,000 women, and have developed a community of over five million people. Unfortunately, there is no PAC for conservative women of equal size, structure, power, or resources that comes close to the presence and impact of EMILY's list. There are conservative PACs such as the Susan B. Anthony List, VIEW PAC, and Maggie's list, but none compare to EMILY's list.⁵⁶ In 2017, the GOP did launch the PAC Winning Is for Women to be the counterpart of EMILY's List to support conservative female candidates; however, this organization comes 32 years late to the “party” and will have major groundwork to make up. Party leadership should coordinate national efforts to raise awareness for the fundraising disparity between Democrat and Republican women candidates and drive donors to the Women Winning PAC. This can be done through massive marketing initiatives, direct mail campaigns, and state party leaders.

Policymakers: GOP leadership and members of state legislatures in historically red states, particularly those serving in leadership positions, should work closely with states such as Alaska, Idaho, South Dakota, Arizona, and Arkansas to review what best practices can be implemented to encourage greater diversity and representation in the legislature by empowering more conservative women to run—particularly the merits of introducing term limits to legislatures, a policy many conservatives favor and a change that has the potential to have lasting impacts on the diversity of the legislature. Additionally, conservative state legislators should be strongly encouraged to mentor diverse potential candidates in their community, encouraging them to run and introducing them to donor networks.

Utah: In Utah, nonpartisan organizations like Real Women Run and the Women's Leadership Institute both provide campaign trainings and candidate resources to women of both parties; however, an organization does not exist that focuses specifically on recruiting and training Republican women. Party leadership should work with party leaders and elected officials to create such a program. In addition, nonpartisan organizations, such as the ones listed previously, could create sub-programs with targeted training for Republican and Democrat women.⁵⁷ In addition, the Utah GOP should work with existing Republican women organizations such as the Utah Federation of Republican Women, Professional Republican Women, Davis County Republican Women, Republican Women of Utah Valley, and the “Troublemakers” to recruit, encourage, and partner in sharing resources for women to run at all levels of government. In addition to implementing a robust training and recruiting program/ mechanism for conservative women in the state, donors should set up a PAC and other funding sources specifically for

⁵³ Shames, S. (2015). Right the ratio. *Political Parity*. <http://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/primary-hurdles-full-report.pdf>, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Shames, S. (2015). Right the ratio. *Political Parity*. <http://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/primary-hurdles-full-report.pdf>

⁵⁵ EMILY's List. (2019). *EMILY's List: Ignite Change*. <https://emilyslist.org/>

⁵⁶ Shames, S. (2015). Right the ratio. *Political Parity*. <http://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/primary-hurdles-full-report.pdf>

⁵⁷ CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (1999–2019). Fact sheet archives. *Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University*; Women's Leadership Institute. (2019). *Women's Leadership Institute*. <https://wliut.com/political-development-for-women/>

conservative women and work to make those funds available during primaries rather than withholding funds until a nomination has been secured.

In addition to fundraising, recruitment, and training, the state GOP can also implement inclusive messaging strategies to encourage women to step forward as leaders in the party. In 2017, in a controlled field experiment, letters were sent to precinct chairs highlighting the importance of diversity and encouraged chairs to recruit women to attend the caucus. They would also read a letter at caucus night encouraging caucus attendees to nominate and elect women as delegates. The results were surprisingly positive in that there was a substantial increase in the number of elected female delegates, demonstrating that simple messaging adjustments can change behavior and increase female representation at the grass roots level of party participation, which can then lead to future involvement and leadership within the party and community.⁵⁸

Conclusion

If people hope to see an increase in the number of conservative women serving in Congress, as governor, and one day as president, the pipeline of women created begins in state legislatures. To do so, organizations should be created and/or utilized that are specifically focused on recruiting Republican women and empowering them with the resources, training, and fundraising needed to succeed. Party leadership for the GOP at both the state and national level should focus efforts on recruitment and work with high-profile donors to create PACs focused exclusively on funding female conservative candidates—both in primary and general elections. While discussing the importance of female representation in political office, former Republican Lt. Governor Kerry Healey of Massachusetts said it best: “The mounting issues facing our country are complex. If we’re going to solve these problems, we can no longer afford to leave the talent of half of our nation out of the conversation.”⁵⁹ This is especially the case in red states, in which where Republican women are overwhelmingly underrepresented— their valuable perspectives are desperately needed in the chambers of state government to better meet the needs of their communities as they advocate on behalf of conservative principles and values as leaders and examples of public service in their communities.

Appendix: CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics). (1999–2019). Fact sheet archives.

Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University.

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-state-legislature-2018>

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-state-legislature-2017>

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-state-legislature-2016>

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-state-legislature-2015>

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg2014.pdf>

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg2013.pdf>

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg2012.pdf>

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg2011.pdf>

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<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg2006.pdf>

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⁵⁸ Karpowitz, C. F., Monson, J. Q., & Preece, J. R. (2017). How to elect more women: Gender and candidate success in a field experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(4), 927–943. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12300>

⁵⁹ Shames, S. (2015). Right the ratio. *Political Parity*. <http://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/primary-hurdles-full-report.pdf>, p. 8.

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg2004.pdf>
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<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/stleg1999.pdf>

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