

Eastern Illinois University

## The Keep

---

Student Honors Theses, Senior Capstones, and  
More

Political Science

---

4-27-2018

### **How do Gender Focused Political Action Campaigns, such as EMILY'S List, Contribute to the Number of Women Running for Office?**

Paige Franzen

Follow this and additional works at: [https://thekeep.eiu.edu/polisci\\_students](https://thekeep.eiu.edu/polisci_students)



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#)

---

Paige Franzen

27 April 2018

PLS 4600

Final Paper

**How do Gender Focused Political Action Campaigns, such as EMILY'S List, Contribute to the Number of Women Running for Office?**

2018 is already being called the “Year of the Woman.” As we begin to see political movements rise such as the #MeToo movement, or #TimesUp, women of all socioeconomic statuses, cultures, political parties, and ages come together to bring awareness to women’s issues, such as the gender pay gap, sexual assault and harassment, and the misrepresentation of women in politics. One political action committee, EMILY’s list, works to elect democratic, pro-choice, female candidates to all levels of state and local office. According to their mission statement, EMILY’S List, which is an acronym that stands for “Early Money is Like Yeast,” is a political action committee that is committed to using monetary contributions to elect pro-choice female democrats to office, elect leaders to will enact change, and to engage in women’s issues and to have these issues be heard (EMILY’s List). Some of EMILY’s list most famous candidates include former Secretary of State and 2016 Democratic Presidential Candidate Hilary Clinton, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Senator Kamala Davis, and Governor Kate Brown of Oregon. Although EMILY’s List candidate Hillary Clinton did not win the 2016 Presidential election, EMILY’s list has seen a huge wave of interest in their mission of electing pro-choice, democratic, female candidates to all levels of elected office. Since 2016, the number of women who have signed up to run for office through EMILY’s list has risen to 26,000, and 8,000 more

people who have signed up to support them (EMILY's List). Although EMILY's List supports pro-choice, democratic, female candidates running for office, the presence of groups like EMILY's List has led to the number of women of all political leanings and views to run for elected office. Since 1985, the presence of gender focused political action groups such as EMILY's List have led to the increase of the number of women of all political ideologies to run for elected office.

EMILY's List was founded in 1985 by Ellen R. Malcom. Malcom, had worked for years on Capitol Hill for various legislators and other politicians. Malcom saw the need for greater political participation of women and the need for awareness on women's issues. Malcom, along with 25 of her colleagues started EMILY's List in the basement of her home, by sending letters to potential sponsors and supporters of the PAC, and in hopes of starting to raise money for pro-choice, democratic, female candidates (Jaquette 1997). By 1986, EMILY's List had gained enough support to have their first candidate elected to office (Littvay, Hannagan, and Pimlott 2010). By November 1986, Senator Barbara Mikulski was elected to the United States Senate as a junior Senator from Minnesota. Senator Mikulski went on to be the longest serving female Senator in the history of the United States Congress. By 1988, EMILY's List had raised \$1,000,000 in funds to support their candidates, 1988 saw a reversal in the decline of Democratic female candidates serving in the House of Representatives, with the election of Representatives Nita Lowery and Jolene Unsoeld, increasing the number of democratic women representatives to 14 (Littvay, Hannagan, and Pimlott 2010). 1992 saw the first ever documented "Year of the Woman," when EMILY's saw their membership grow over 600 percent, with 23,000 members donating over \$10.2 million to the cause. During the 1992 election cycle, with the support of EMILY's List, 4 new female senators and 20 new female representatives were elected to office

(Jaquette 1997). Since then, EMILY's List has seen several successes, including the appointment of EMILY's List candidate Nancy Pelosi to the Speaker of the House in 2006, and the election of the first the first African American woman to the Senate, Senator Carol Moseley Braun. In 2016, EMILY's List announced that they would be supporting former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her Presidential run. Although former Secretary Clinton did not win the election, the support raised by EMILY's List helped in part for the first women candidate for a major political party to run for President and helped her win the popular vote by over 3 million votes. 2016 also saw the election of four new women candidates elected to office, three of which being women of color. Catherine Cortez Masto became the first the first female Senator from Nevada, as well as the first Latina Senator. In addition, EMILY's List helped elect the first Thai American to the Senate, Senator Tammy Duckworth, as well as the second African American female Senator and first Indian American to be elected to the United States Senate, Senator Kamala Davis. 2016 did not only see success in the Senate for EMILY's List. EMILY's List helped elect right new female, pro-choice, democratic candidates to the House of Representatives, six of them being women of color. Because of the successes of 2016, currently, there is not only a tie in the record of women serving in Congress, but also a record number of women of color serving in the Senate as well. Since then, between the 1985 and 2016 election cycles, EMILY's List has raised a total of \$406 million for their candidates. Currently, EMILY's List membership is up to five million members, with 26,000 new female candidates registered to gain support from EMILY's List in order to run for all levels of elected office in future elections (EMILY's List).

With financial support of EMILY's List only continuing to grow, EMILY's List has found a way to bypass current campaign finance laws that limit PAC contributions to candidates to \$5,000 in primary elections and \$5,000 in general elections, in order to raise the most money

possible for their candidates (Littvay, Hannagan, and Pimlott 2010). They bypass these laws by a technique called “bundling.” “Bundling” can be described as instead of donors writing checks to candidates, EMILY’s List has their donors send checks to the campaign of the candidate that they support, rather than the PAC themselves. After this, EMILY’s List bundles all checks together and then forwards the sum of the campaigns to the candidates, which allows for the effect of the individual donations to be maximized (Littvay, Hannagan, and Pimlott 2010). EMILY’s List does not only use its donations for election purposes, but uses donations for the costs of “recruiting, grooming, and preparing profiles of endorsed candidates” (Hirschmann, 1993). Contributors to EMILY’s List tend to donate between \$100 and \$5,000 to help supplement these costs. EMILY’s List Candidates benefit from these contributions in many ways. First, there is no legal limit to the amount that can be “bundled” to a single candidate, so donors are more likely to donate if they know their donation will be bundled with other donations. Finally, a candidate who is supported by EMILY’s List stands out to the liberal PAC community that she is friendly and financially stable to hold office.

Although EMILY’s List has found a way to bypass campaign finance laws, there has been much controversy over their practice of bundling donations to candidates. In January 2005, EMILY’s List leadership brought the Federal Election Committee all the way to U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. EMILY’s List challenged the Federal Election Commission on their “regulations requiring nonprofit advocacy to fund percentages of their expenditures through limited hard-money accounts” (Hoffman 2010). The three specific regulations that the EMILY’s List leadership challenged was regulations the use of “hard money,” and the Federal Election Commission’s definition of “contribution,” dealing with the EMILY’s List stated that the FEC’s regulations were unconstitutional because nonprofit expenditures that are not direct contributions

are protected by the First Amendment. In addition, EMILY's List also stated that the First Amendment allows for individuals to come together in order to spend unlimited amounts to express how they feel about candidates and to support the policies that they agree with. In contrast, the FEC stated that the regulations were permissible because nonprofit groups have grown so large that they now rival for-profit contributions to campaigns, and that these regulations would "equalize the voice of citizens and interest groups more appropriately" (Hoffman 2010). The D.C. Court of Appeals found that expenditure limitations are protected by the First Amendment, and that contributions to candidates have been allowed less protections than expenditures. In addition, the Court struck down all three "challenged" FEC regulations and stated that these regulations allowed for the Federal Election Committee to have exceeded authority.

Like previously stated, although EMILY's List is currently the most successful gender-focused political action campaign, there are also several counterparts that help elect Republican candidates to all levels of elected office. In their article, "If You Can't Join 'Em, Beat 'Em: The Gender Gap in Individual Donations to Congressional Candidates" Authors Mary Crespin and Jamie Deitz investigate the discrepancy between the amount raised by democratic female-based PACs and republican-based PACs. Currently, there are three smaller republican gender-focused Political Action Campaigns. The Wish List, is a PAC founded in 1992 that works to elect pro-choice republican candidates to the United States House of Representatives and Senate. Like EMILY's List, The Wish List practices bundling in order to maximize donations for their candidates. To date, The Wish List has raised over \$1 million for their candidates (Crespin and Deitz 2009). Another republican political action committee that is starting to grow is Maggie's List. According to their official website, Maggie's List was founded in 2010 with the goal of

"raising awareness and funds to increase the number of conservative women elected to federal public office" (Crespin and Deitz 2009). Although there are conservative counterparts to EMILY's List, EMILY's List is still much larger and raises much more funds than their conservative counterparts. Crespin and Dietz state that that Democratic, pro-choice, women candidates are seeing strong gains in congressional representation, while Republic women candidates are not seeing an increase at the same growing rate. Crespin and Dietz state that there are several reasons for this, including the success of minority women who, "disproportionally run as Democrats", and differences in fundraising for these candidates. Their research found that the differences in amount earned by the Women's PACS "stem from the activities of female donor networks and the ideological leanings of individual donors in the congressional donor pool" (Crespin and Deitz 2009). On a consistent basis, Women House Members earn most of their total campaign funds through small funds less than \$200 dollars. According the Center for American Women and Politics in 2008, there were 47 donor networks that either gave money to predominately women or donated to organizations that had a predominately female donor base. But, in most cases, almost all the funds that were donated to a gender focused PAC went to EMILY's List (Crespin and Deitz 2009).

Like previously stated, there are several reasons for the difference in the amount raised by each women's political action committee, but the main reason is because women usually run for office as democrats, so if one wants to support a woman candidate, she will most likely be supported by a liberal leading PAC. In their article, "The Policy Preferences of Women's PAC Contributors" Leanne Day and Catherine Hadley state that the difference in the amount raised by EMILY's List and The Wish List is due to their political leanings. Their research starts with a study of the demographics of the people who contribute to these gender focused PACS, and their

motivation to do so. First, the study shows that that the population that donated to these Women's PACs were overwhelmingly female, with 94% of EMILY's List contributors being female, and 89% of WISH contributors being female. Out of the small sample of men who contributed to these PACs, this study finds that the "commitment to social, political, and economic equality to be strong among EMILY's List women and men and weaker among WISH List women, demonstrating the power of partisanship over gender in explaining attitudes" (Day and Hadley 2011). In addition, this study found that EMILY's List women tend to be more supportive of feminist ideals than either EMILY's list men or WISH women. Contributors to EMILY's List tend to be in accordance with more liberal ideals such as social welfare and welfare benefits, promoting equality, and stopping the use of force, and tend to have a "higher degree of trust in the government, and consider themselves feminists, while WISH supporters tend to be in support of more conservative ideals and have more of a libertarian view towards government due to their "views on reproductive rights and women's equality in politics" (Day and Hadley 2001). Day and Hadley find that the ideals important to these supporters can be encompassed by three categories, symbolic politics, trust in government, and social status. A recent study done by Hadley and Day investigates who exactly donates to these committees, and their motivation to do so.

Since 1985, EMILY's List has made much progress getting their candidates elected and increasing awareness to women's issues and raising notoriety of female candidates running for office. During the 2013 campaign cycle, 80% of candidates endorsed by EMILY's List won their general election, with most of the positions being won in State Houses and Senate (EMILY's List). One main goal of EMILY's List is to invest early in a female, pro-choice, democratic woman's campaign early. They do so that they can groom the candidate and have them develop

habits and a donor base that will follow them through their career and through higher levels of elected office. One example of an EMILY's List candidate that grew through the ranks was former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. On April 12, 2015, EMILY's List announced that they would be supporting Hillary Clinton in her presidential run. Within the first hours of the announcement, EMILY's List had already "bundled" \$855,518 in donations from their donors to give to her campaign, making EMILY's List one of the top five contributors to her campaign (EMILY's List). Although Secretary Clinton did not win the election, she became the first woman to be nominated for President by a major political party and won the popular vote by over 3 million votes. In addition, her nomination helped reignite interest in EMILY's List and women's issues. In addition, 2016 saw EMILY's List have 4 Democratic women elected to the United States Senate, three of which were women of color. In terms of the House, during the 2016 election cycle, EMILY's List helped elect eight new women to the House of Representatives (6 of which are women of color), as well as helped elected the first LBGQT Governor, Kate Brown of Oregon (Harnish 2018). Like previously mentioned throughout this research, today, although EMILY's List saw a significant blow with the loss of the Presidential election by Hillary Clinton, they have only grown. Currently, EMILY's List has 5 million supporters, and 26,000 new, pro-choice, democratic, women running for office, and 8,000 new volunteers ready to support them. Since 1985, there has been a 33% increase in the number of pro-choice, democratic, female candidates elected to office (Harnish 2018). The Wish List and Maggie's List, EMILY's List conservative counterparts are also seeing growth in their organizations. The Wish List has raised over \$1 million dollars in support of their candidates, and has worked to elect two governors, 10 members of the House of Representatives, and four Senators, along with many other members of state legislators. Also, Maggie's List, which was

founded in 2010 has grown to endorse over 100 women who are running for all levels of elected office and continue to raise support and funds for their candidates (Our Mission).

Today, EMILY's List is making significant strides for women of all political ideologies that are running for elected office. Like previously stated, after the inception of EMILY's List in 1985, three more major gender focused political action committees that support republican women candidates have been created as well. Currently, democratic, pro-choice, women candidates are seeing strong gains in Congressional representation while Republican women candidates are not seeing an increase at the same rate. When EMILY's List was founded in 1985, women only held 5% of congressional seats. Currently, women hold 19.4% of the total Congressional seats in the United States, with that number only projected to grow in the 2018 Election Cycle (Harnish 2018). Out of the 104 women who are currently serving in Congress, 33 of them are women of color, 18 of them being African American, 9 Latinas, and 6 Asian Americans (EMILY's List). Even though this research has proven that these women who are elected to all levels of elected office usually run and are elected as democrats, the 19.4% of women are of both major political leanings. Currently, there are 59 women of both major political parties that are running for federal Congressional seats in 2018 (Harnish 2018). Although midterm election participation is usually much lower than general elections, due to the nature of this election and the stakes at risk, many are already pledging to get out there and vote, "51 percent of Democratic-leaning voters planned to vote in midterms, compared to just 34 percent of Republican-voters" (Harnish 2018). In addition to getting women to run for office, there has been a huge increase in women mobilizing through voting efforts, protests, and helping others get registered to vote. It is projected that 2018 will take the title of the "Year of the

Woman” from 1992, and due to Trump-Era politics and the push for women’s rights, will see more success than ever before.

## REFERENCES

- Crespin, M. H., & Deitz, J. L. (2009). If You Can’t Join ’Em, Beat ’Em: The Gender Gap in Individual Donations to Congressional Candidates. *Political Research Quarterly*, 63(3), 581-593. doi:10.1177/1065912909333131
- Day, C. L., & Hadley, C. D. (2001). Feminist Diversity: The Policy Preferences of Womens PAC Contributors. *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(3), 673. doi:10.2307/449276
- Day, C. L., Hadley, C. D., & Brown, M. D. (2001). Gender, Feminism, and Partisanship among Womens PAC Contributors. *Social Science Quarterly*, 82(4), 687-700. doi:10.1111/0038-4941.00053
- EMILY's List. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://emilyslist.org/pages/entry/our-history>
- Hannagan, R. J., Pimlott, J. P., & Littvay, L. (2010). Does an EMILYs List Endorsement Predict Electoral Success, or Does EMILY Pick the Winners? *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 43(03), 503-508. doi:10.1017/s1049096510000739
- Harnish, A., & Bari, K. (2018). Women Activists Are Laying The Groundwork Now To Win Big In Midterms. Retrieved from <https://www.refinery29.com/2018/04/197495/activists-women-running-for-office-midterms-2018>
- Hirschmann, S. (1993). Emily’s list: Chicks with Checks. *American Spectator*.26.(4), 20.

Hoffman, N. (2010). EMILY's List v. FEC. *American Bar Association*, 42(1), 210-212.

Retrieved February 13, 2018.

Jaquette, J. S. (1997). Women in Power: From Tokenism to Critical Mass. *Foreign Policy*, (108),

23. doi:10.2307/1149087

Our Mission. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.maggieslist.org/about>