



Women in the Club: Gender and Policy Making in the Senate

Michele L. Swers

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In the run-up to the 2012 presidential election, Democrats and Republicans were locked in a fierce battle for the female vote. Democrats charged Republicans with waging a “war on women,” while Republicans countered that Democratic policies actually undermined women’s rights. The women of the Senate wielded particular power, planning press conferences, appearing on political programs, and taking to the Senate floor over gender-related issues such as workplace equality and reproductive rights.

The first book to examine the impact of gender differences in the Senate, *Women in the Club* is an eye-opening exploration of how women are influencing policy and politics in this erstwhile male bastion of power. Gender, Michele L. Swers shows, is a fundamental factor for women in the Senate, interacting with both party affiliation and individual ideology to shape priorities on policy. Women, for example, are more active proponents of social welfare and women’s rights. But the effects of gender extend beyond mere policy preferences. Senators also develop their priorities with an eye to managing voter expectations about their expertise and advancing their party’s position on a given issue. The election of women in increasing numbers has also coincided with the evolution of the Senate as a highly partisan institution. The stark differences between the parties on issues pertaining to gender have meant that Democratic and Republican senators often assume very different roles as they reconcile their policy views on gender issues with the desire to act as members of partisan teams championing or defending their party’s record in an effort to reach various groups of voters.

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