

University of Mary Washington

Eagle Scholar

Student Research Submissions

Spring 2023

Gender and Political Candidacy in Hampton Roads, Virginia

Mary-Elise Alworth

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research

Recommended Citation

Alworth, Mary-Elise, "Gender and Political Candidacy in Hampton Roads, Virginia" (2023). *Student Research Submissions*. 533.

https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research/533

This Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by Eagle Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Research Submissions by an authorized administrator of Eagle Scholar. For more information, please contact archives@umw.edu.

Gender and Political Candidacy in Hampton Roads, Virginia

Mary-Elise Alworth

University of Mary Washington

PS 491H Honors Thesis in Political Science

Spring 2023

Abstract

Although they comprise half of the United States population, women are underrepresented as candidates and officeholders in state legislatures and Congress. This is particularly true of legislatures in southern states where women's representation is acutely low, and these states typically fall in the bottom quintile of women's representation as tracked by the Center for American Women in Politics. Research on political efficacy by Stauffer (2021) suggests that women's presence in elected office garners greater trust, confidence, and satisfaction in political institutions and increases their legitimacy. In the retelling of Virginia's political history, women are often absent, despite their continued presence and significant work in the political arena. When looking at women's presence in the Virginia General Assembly and its congressional delegation over the last several decades, it is evident that women officeholders primarily come from three areas of the state – Northern Virginia, Richmond, and the Hampton Roads area. As a diverse, growing region of southern Virginia, this research explores Hampton Roads and the women legislators it produces. I examine women's candidacies for the Virginia General Assembly in Hampton Roads and Norfolk and the corresponding Virginia's 2nd Congressional District from 2005 to 2023. I find that women from both parties have sought and won legislative seats in the Virginia General Assembly and the U.S. House of Representatives. The party competitiveness of this region provides important opportunities to increase women's representation and incentives for Virginia Democratic and Republican parties to support their candidates.

Context and Background of Virginia's Political History

Virginia is a state where white men have dominated in the congressional delegation and statehouse, thus its political history is important to examine in understanding where women have been left out, and how they continue to be excluded from historical narratives. As Virginia's population diversified, eventually those running for office did too along with their success in getting elected. The southern United States has seen population growth and changes in the demographic as a result. Virginia is no exception to this, as evidenced by a 72 percent rise in population from 1970 to 2010, which contributed to the increase of people from various minority groups (Bullock, et al. 2019). The electorate is changing in the South, and many states that once were considered overwhelmingly Republican are noticing increases in their metropolitan cities' population who vote blue, turning the state purple rather than consistently red. Diverse communities provide more opportunities for non-traditional candidates to emerge, thus creating an arena where women feel compelled to run for office (Melusky, et al. 2020). Where non-traditional candidates may not feel as welcome though, would be where money politics is widespread and those who are elected (or reelected) are those whose campaigns have generous donations from corporations or influential companies. As candidates with less experience in the political arena, garnering funds that are competitive with incumbents who often have large sums of money from longtime donors poses a challenge. People who belong to a historically marginalized group also do not feel particularly enticed to run due to the disproportionate representation in elected positions, as well as the history of racism and discrimination across the United States and particularly in the South. The Virginia General Assembly has seen a significant increase in women candidates since 2016 and has become a Democrat-leaning state in

presidential elections, becoming a state conducive to a more diverse candidate pool. But this has not always been the case.

The Virginia Way by Jeff Thomas describes a Virginia government corrupted by power-hungry politicians with overwhelming desires to accrue money and economic and political leverage. Thomas argues that this behavior is characteristic of a new “Virginia Way”, a “corporate-centric philosophy by which state government had not been run since colonial times” (Thomas 2019). This new Virginia Way is compared to the traditional (and favorable) understanding of the Virginia Way, which focuses on Virginia’s history in the establishment of the United States, its range of land types and topographical variation, and its prominent role in politics (Toscano 2022). Thomas illustrates how elected officials have abandoned their responsibilities as public servants and disregard the old Virginia Way that expected a strong moral compass and held them to a higher standard. In his discussion of the Virginia Way, his examples come from men officeholders, a theme present in many narratives on Virginia’s political history. He further argues that today we see legislators receiving large campaign donations from corporations and businesses, which is then reflected in their votes and bill proposals. Virginia has seen quite a bit of growth, from technological advances and Fortune 500 companies headquartered in the North to one of the world’s largest naval installations in the Southeast, making it easy to see why economics and pro-business policies are important to Virginians, and why politicians capitalize on the funds they receive from companies. In Thomas’ articulation of the Virginia Way, women are absent from the discussions, which suggests that women officeholders in the Commonwealth did not garner sufficient clout to be included in this “pay to play” version of the politic.

In his book, *Virginia in the Vanguard*, Frank B. Atkinson explores Virginia's political history post-Byrd Organization and conservative Democratic leadership. Similarly to Thomas, Atkinson leaves women out of the retelling of this history. Up until the end of the Byrd Organization, Virginia was dominated by conservative forces in political leadership. Part 1 addresses Charles Robb's election to governor in 1981 and its significance for the Democratic party's success in the state. Atkinson focuses on the role of race in Virginia politics culminating in the 1989 Virginia gubernatorial election when Democrat Douglas Wilder became the first elected Black governor. However, starting in the 1980s the South increasingly saw gains by Republicans and the region eventually moved from reliably blue to reliably red, and Virginia was no exception to switches in party fortunes. The South has been a region of the United States that has been reliably red, with few options for swing states. In the last few decades, however, competition has become more difficult for candidates in the Old Dominion. After the Democratic leadership of Robb, Baliles, and Wilder, George Allen and Jim Gilmore served terms as Governor in the 1990s until Democrats took back the office in the early 2000s. Similarly, seats in the Virginia General Assembly have changed back and forth from red to blue. Between 1991 and 2019, the House of Delegates saw Republicans shift partisan control, with more recent House seats flipping to blue (Ballotpedia). From 1994 to 2019, the partisan trends of the Virginia Senate have seen fluctuation between the majority being red or blue, indicating a changing and growing state that has been considered a swing state in past presidential elections, just recently being categorized as a blue state (Ballotpedia).

Atkinson discusses the use of centrist and moderate views from Democrat Mark Warner in his campaign for governor as a method to sway voters in rural southwest Virginia, promoting himself as a "business guy" who can work across the aisle (Atkinson 2006). Constituents tend to

favor candidates and officeholders who promote their bipartisanship, in state and presidential elections. Warner won the gubernatorial election in 2001 and successfully persuaded a Republican-dominated legislature to agree to a \$1.36 billion tax increase (Weisman 2021). Warner's success, population changes in Northern Virginia, and wins in Virginia for the Democratic presidential nominees in the 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 elections by Obama, Clinton, and Biden suggest statewide change in party preference in the aggregate. Change also offers opportunities for women political candidates. Recent research has found that women legislators are more ideologically polarized, which may be due to several factors like a general increase in polarization in representation as well as the state population and the possibility that some women represent systematically different districts than men (Osborn 2019). Although they are more polarized in roll-call voting, women are ideologically indistinguishable from men legislators from their party (Osborn 2019). With Democrat and Republican women legislators becoming more liberal and conservative respectively, exploring who decides to run and how they fare in elections is imperative in understanding this polarization.

Race and Place in Virginia

The United States has a deep, harmful history of racism that permeates every part of our society, present in our governing bodies, schools, economy, and health and justice systems. It creates a culture that perpetuates racist ideals and practices, and Virginia is no exception. After slavery was outlawed in America, southern states implemented Jim Crow laws to enforce segregation and continue a racist power system. Although the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits legal racial discrimination in voting, racism persists in our political system. Gerrymandering is a contemporary example of a discriminatory practice that is legal and puts partisan legislators drawing the district lines at an advantage, allowing them to decide who their

voters are, which typically will help them significantly come election day (Tarter 2019). The Supreme Court heard a case on October 4, 2022, regarding redistricting in Alabama that forced Black residents into one congressional district where they make up the majority rather than two districts. In Virginia, the General Assembly redrew district lines for the House of Delegates and Senate, as well as the U.S. House of Representatives in 2021 (Tarter 2019). Disguised as democratic, unfair practices like gerrymandering significantly decrease political activity and further silence minority voices, preserving a system that advantages white people. The United States has historically taken actions to exclude Black people from voting, using poll taxes, literacy tests, and land ownership as prerequisites for casting a vote. The South especially has taken action to protect racist legislation and resist federally mandated laws to advance equality, slowing down the progress America has made in working towards racial equity. These exclusionary and harmful practices have also influenced who has sought and held political office.

Virginia's role in American slavery and segregation is a significant one. In 1619, the first enslaved Africans were brought to America and arrived in Virginia (Ruane 2019). The Virginia General Assembly passed a law in 1705 that allowed enslavers to kill the people they enslaved (Ruane 2019). Virginia saw horrific battles fought across the state during the Civil War, as Richmond, Virginia served as the capital of the Confederacy. Southeastern Virginia was where the largest number of enslaved Virginians lived, and their enslavers were overrepresented in the Senate and House of Delegates in the General Assembly, making sure that the majority would be in favor of the institution of slavery (Tarter 2019). As the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, segregationist, Senator of Virginia, and leader of the Byrd political machine Harry S. Byrd rejected the court-ordered integration of public schools, leading to the closing of schools that

refused to integrate and the subsequent establishment of white-only private schools (Ruane, 2019). The aforementioned events exhibit Virginia's historically discriminatory attitude toward Black people, creating a space where they were excluded, unwelcome, and prevented from exercising their human rights even as they were central to the functioning of the Commonwealth.

Virginia is a prominent southern state with a history of military involvement; it acted as a hub of colonial life when settlers first came to Jamestown, then became involved in the American Revolution, War of 1812, and Civil War. Moreover, Virginia became an especially important state during World War II with significant population growth in the cities of Norfolk and Pentagon, which saw an influx of soldiers and military personnel. Between 1940 and 1944, Hampton Roads saw its population nearly double, with 80 percent of new residents hailing from places outside Virginia (Lassiter, et al. 2010). Southeastern Virginia has been active in major wars taking place in the United States, from the Battle of Yorktown, a great victory during the American Revolution, to Fort Monroe in Hampton serving as a Union base during the Civil War. The Battle of Hampton Roads took place in the body of water adjacent to Norfolk where the James, Elizabeth, and Nansemond rivers meet before entering the Chesapeake Bay. This battle between the CSS Virginia and USS Monitor occurred as a result of the Union forces placing a blockade on Norfolk and Richmond, and the Confederacy's attempts to break it. The City of Portsmouth is home to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard established before the U.S. Navy and produced forty-two warships during World War II (Lassiter, et al. 2010). Black people were drawn to Norfolk during wartime in hopes of improving their financial circumstances, and while they were able to find work in a segregated job market, they were underemployed and racially discriminated against in hiring processes (Lewis 1991). The Norfolk wards that were majority Black residents were consistently neglected by the City, and as a result of the Housing Act of

1949, Norfolk became the location of the nation's first federally funded urban renewal project after World War II (Lassiter, et al. 2010).

Hampton Roads was a haven for freedom seekers during the Civil War, hospitalizing wounded African American soldiers that Harriet Tubman helped treat at Fort Monroe (Fort Monroe 2021). It is home to Hampton University and Norfolk State University, both historically Black higher education institutions. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* was founded in 1910 by editor P.B. Young and became the leading Black newspaper of the South (Lewis 1991).

Southeastern Virginia has a rich history that Black people have positively contributed to while being denied fair and equal treatment because of their race. Generations of racial segregation continue to be visible in the cities of Hampton Roads. In Norfolk, the majority of public housing is located in poor areas of the city with fewer resources, and those who live in public housing are Black (Murphy 2021). Large cities with diverse populations like Norfolk, Virginia Beach, and Newport News have contributed to the significant population growth that the South has seen in recent decades and Virginia's recognition as a 'Growth State' (Bullock, et al. 2019). What cannot continue in these cities is the discouragement of democracy through redistricting, which often assigns voters to a new polling place, creating a disadvantage for the minority party. As it continues to grow, the South and Hampton Roads must provide space for all residents to know their vote matters, even when unfair practices remain in use. Despite these limitations, the Hampton Roads area has seen Black people successfully run for and hold state legislative office, including Black women who remain underrepresented as officeholders in the Commonwealth.

Gender and Campaigns

In this section, I focus on the current literature on gender and political candidacy. I discuss gender and campaigns, including the candidacy pipeline, party affiliation, and legislative

professionalism. Taken together, research on these themes of gender and political candidacy enhances our understanding of women's political candidacy in Virginia and identifies the Hampton Roads area as a fruitful place for women to run for office. The political history of Virginia -and the United States more broadly- is one that has excluded Black people and women, essentially anyone who was not white and male. The absence of women in politics is an issue that has a long history in part to do with the historical treatment of women as property of their husbands or male relatives, and their subsequent categorization as second-class citizens. In the United States, women did not gain the right to vote until 1920, and even then it was only a portion of women, as politicians in the South made it a part of their agendas to prevent African Americans of either sex from exercising the rights granted to them by the 15th and 19th Amendments. The current Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, is the highest-ranking female elected official in U.S. history. While women have yet to hold the highest office in the United States, women's representation on local, state, and federal levels is increasing. Women are becoming more involved in politics and running for office in recent years and especially in 2017 after the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016. Despite the increase in women candidates, women continue to be underrepresented in all levels of government, especially in the South, where many Southern states find themselves in the lower half of state rankings of women in state legislatures. Women do not run as often as men, and the lack of women representatives can decrease the legitimacy of our democratic system and hinder the advocacy of women and their needs in the legislature, thus their candidacy and officeholding is especially necessary to the welfare of our country, and it is important to understand why women do not run (Dolan 2014).

Even though women do not run for office as often as men do, Dolan (2014) finds that women are often stronger candidates than men because they expect to encounter gender bias in running and subsequently delay their candidacies until they meet their own credibility thresholds. Why women choose not to run has been studied by many political scientists, with Susan Welch offering three possible explanations as to why women are less inclined to run for political office. Welch theorizes that situational factors, structural factors, and political socialization are explanations for the lack of women running for office as well as other forms of political participation (Dolan 2014). Situational factors have to do with the private life responsibilities women hold, particularly relating to domestic duties, and women with young children often want to wait until their children are older to seek office (Dolan 2014). Structural explanations center on the unlikelihood of women holding advanced degrees and higher incomes as compared to men, and that well-educated men with significant incomes tend to be names that we see on the ballot, due to their opportunities, privilege, and access to resources that women have historically been denied (Dolan 2014). Welch's final explanation is the socialization of women to be more politically passive, though she did not find much support for this (Dolan 2014).

Other lines of inquiry regarding women's political candidacy have focused on women's political ambition. Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox have found that women are less likely to consider running for office because they are less likely to have been encouraged to pursue politics in their homes, more likely to bear the brunt of the work in raising children, and because they are less likely to see themselves as viable candidates compared to men (Lawless and Fox 2010). If women are more likely to devalue the qualities that make them good candidates, it follows that they would desire encouragement from someone in politics who sees their potential, and Lawless and Fox find that being recruited by a party official is much more important to

women than it is to men (Lawless and Fox 2010). Research from Kira Sanbonmatsu (2006) suggests two things, “1) party leaders make fewer formal attempts to recruit women and 2) the informal networks of political elites remain largely male, which denies women opportunities to participate in the candidate recruitment process,”. Sanbonmatsu and Carroll (2013) find that a woman’s decision-making about office holding involves the consideration of others, their thoughts and reactions, and how candidacy would impact the people in their lives with whom they have close relationships.

Once they decide to run, however, women find success in their campaigns, raising sufficient sums to finance them (Burrell 2015). Women have filled party campaign leadership positions, contributing to the increase in donations and financing of campaigns. The Women’s Campaign Forum “Vote with Your Purse” study and follow-up studies have shown that women’s political groups are active in the political process by way of supporting women’s candidacies (Burrell 2015). In the U.S. House of Representatives elections, there is little evidence to support a gender bias; women receive the same percentage of votes, win at the same rates, and face similar levels of opposition when running for reelection as male candidates do (Burrell 2015). The issue is that women do not run for various aforementioned reasons, and often take less linear paths to candidacy (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). The 1992 elections saw a substantial increase in women running for office and being elected in congressional races, and was called the ‘Year of the Woman’. Similarly, we see a wave of women who were elected to state legislatures in 2017, most of these women belonging to the Democratic party. Historically, the Republican party has put forward fewer women candidates at all levels of government, and they have been slowly increasing these numbers. The different party cultures and recruitment approaches contribute to the smaller amounts of Republican women we see in office (Elder

2021). Democratic women of color have been successful in their campaigns, creating trends that allow for our local, state, and national leaders to be more representative of our diverse population, increasing democracy and opportunity for specific needs to be advocated for on all levels of government. The South is one of the regions where women's representation is the lowest, and women's presence as legislators in Virginia remained low until very recently. As the number of women candidates for representative- particularly at the state level- has increased it is important to consider what informs their candidacy and how women view their representational responsibilities.

There are three common pipelines to candidacy that are gendered: those with a background in law who make political contributions, holding a seat in the state legislature, and those named in newspapers as likely candidates (Thomsen and King 2020). These pipelines are overwhelmingly male, as those who decide to run for office often come from careers in law and business. While women's underrepresentation is an issue for both parties, Republican women would have to be nearly five times more likely to run for office than their male co-partisans to reach parity, whereas Democratic women would need to be two and a half times more likely than Democratic men to reach parity (Thomsen and King 2020). Moreover, a negative prominence relationship exists among Republican women, that is, when the number of prominent Republican women officeholders increases, the number of Republican women in state legislatures declines, thus it cannot be assumed that women will always be inspired to run for office by other women who have done so (Manento and Schenk 2021). One of the theories to explain the lack of women candidates is the idea of the "gendered psyche" which suggests that women are not comfortable entering into a patriarchal system and are thus constrained by a society that perpetuates the belief that women do not have as much to contribute as men do (Manento and Schenk 2021). Because

of the finding that electing Republican women to more prominent offices results in fewer Republican women serving in state legislatures, it could be possible that Republican women are impacted more by the “gendered psyche” theory (Manento and Schenk 2021). It was also found that in the Democratic party, women were inspired by other women politicians to run for office (pioneering women hypothesis), but this was not the case for Republican women (Manento and Schenk 2021).

Gender and Representation

Work on representation by Pitkin (1967) identifies four main views of political representation: formalistic representation, descriptive representation, symbolic representation, and substantive representation. Symbolic representation is understood as how well citizens feel they are being “fairly and effectively represented” and can be fulfilled by descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation identifies the extent to which representatives reflect the demographic makeup of their constituencies. Descriptive representation lends itself to substantive representation— electing representatives with similar life experiences and backgrounds who can advocate for the needs of the communities they identify with, offering unique perspectives and allows for the government to be more aware of the needs of all its citizens (Manento and Schenk 2021).

Having representatives in government who identify with minority groups and historically marginalized communities provides many benefits, for example, women’s presence in elected office garners greater trust, confidence, and satisfaction in institutions and increases their legitimacy (Stauffer 2021). An increase in women’s representation serves as a signal that political institutions are more receptive to women, but also that they are welcoming to a variety of viewpoints and perspectives (Stauffer 2021). Despite all the advantages of greater women’s

representation, women do not run for elected office as often as men do, and in order to reach gender parity, women need to be more likely to be recruited than men, have greater political ambition, and lower levels of election aversion (Thomsen and King 2020). As women's experiences shape their priorities, they do not operate in the same way as their male colleagues and their underrepresentation weakens the impact of their substantive representation, which is troubling for legislators attempting to pass laws concerning reproductive rights and pay equity (Elder 2021). The symbolic representation of Black Americans also has significant benefits, as Black representatives illustrate to their Black constituencies that their full humanity is recognized by the state and allows for new policies and issues to be introduced, and can assist representatives in achieving legitimate representation for marginalized groups (Brown 2018). In order to increase the number of people from underrepresented groups running for office, it is important to understand what motivates them to run and the various influences behind their campaigns.

Legislative professionalism plays a role in women's desire to run for office, as they are more likely to run for state legislatures that are more professionalized (Manento and Schenk 2021). Professionalized legislatures have numerous advantages when it comes to substantive representation. Incumbents are considered to be more knowledgeable and aware of their constituents' specific needs and priorities due to their increased capacity to monitor public opinion and manage the public sector (Nemerever and Butler 2020). The ability of representatives to adequately and effectively represent their constituencies plays an important role in public opinion, as citizens' perceptions of officials' representation shape the way they view political institutions (Stauffer 2021). Gender-inclusive institutions give way to more symbolic representation, however, many Americans have misperceptions about women's

representation. Research finds that survey respondents who initially underestimated women's representation indicated higher levels of efficacy after receiving the correct information, whereas overestimators expressed decreased efficacy (Stauffer 2021). This research further indicates that perceptions of women's inclusion are positively associated with feelings of efficacy among both men and women respondents (Stauffer 2021). As women's inclusion increases feelings of trust and serves as a signal that political institutions are responsive to women and people with varying viewpoints, the passage of substantive legislation affirms satisfaction in the system. The passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in Virginia was led by Black women legislators like Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy, who proposed and passed the bill to ratify the ERA.

An increase in candidates from groups that have historically been excluded from political processes allows for greater descriptive, symbolic, and substantive representation and an increase in validity in democratic practices and political institutions. It also fosters trust, confidence, and satisfaction with elected officials and the government more generally (Stauffer 2021). There are various ways that systems can increase the number of more diverse candidate pools, for example, professionalized legislatures are more attractive due to their offering competitive salaries, making it likely that more knowledgeable individuals run for a seat in a professionalized legislature (Nemerever and Butler 2020). By electing diverse candidates, descriptive representation is achievable, further allowing for symbolic representation and considerable connections to constituencies and agenda-setting issues that are specific to historically marginalized communities (Brown 2018). Candidates with backgrounds that extend beyond the traditional business and law careers that create a pipeline to elected office can increase the number of women candidates and people from fields that are not necessarily male-dominated. In order to reach gender parity, women have to be multiple times more likely to run for office than

men, and research has shown that the Republican party has historically struggled more than the Democratic party in putting forward women candidates, which perhaps has to do with Democratic women being viewed as “more liberal” than Democratic men, and Republican women being seen as “more moderate” than their male co-partisans in an increasingly polarized electorate. In the Virginia General Assembly, we see many women with backgrounds in education, an area that many Democratic women focus on. Issues like Education, Healthcare, and Social Welfare are all areas considered to be “women’s issues”, and women legislators propose significantly more bills on average related to Education, Health, Housing & Community Development, and Civil Rights & Liberties (Volden, 2016). Republican women in the Virginia General Assembly, like Delegate Amanda Batten (HD 96) who is the chief patron of bills concerning worker’s compensation and regulations for consumer finance companies, do not introduce or sponsor bills relating to issues explicitly salient to women or women’s issues. The differences we observe in which representatives put forth legislation regarding women or women’s issues suggest that Republican women largely stay away from them to seem more like their male co-partisans, who are seen as more Republican as party polarization becomes increasingly prominent in the political atmosphere.

It is helpful to recognize the various pathways women take to political candidacy to better understand the impact of women's representation. The Hampton Roads area of Virginia has a significant concentration of women and women of color representatives, as 3 women have represented Virginia’s 2nd Congressional District, and the first African American woman, Yvonne B. Miller to serve in both houses of the Virginia General Assembly represented Norfolk. While women and women of color are consistently ignored by literature on Virginia’s political history, they nonetheless make significant changes for their communities. Identifying these

women and their contributions is not only important in having a comprehensive understanding of women's representation but is also significant in thinking about why Black women are successful in elections to the state legislature but were not represented at the federal level until the 2023 Virginia's 4th congressional district special election when Democratic nominee Jennifer McClellan defeated Republican nominee Leon Benjamin. It is important to note that Virginia's 4th congressional district is a safe Democratic seat after the 2016 elections and includes the city of Richmond and the surrounding areas. A similar pattern is displayed in areas of Virginia like the NOVA area and Hampton Roads, localities with congressional districts that have been represented by women.

Virginia's 2nd Congressional District

As of 2023, the 2nd congressional district in the Commonwealth of Virginia (VA-2) encompasses all of Accomack, Northampton, Isle of Wight, Virginia Beach, Franklin, and Suffolk, and parts of Chesapeake and Southampton. The southeasternmost parts of the state are included in VA-2, and the district recently underwent redistricting in late 2021, when the Virginia Supreme Court finalized the new configurations of Virginia's 11 congressional districts. It is important to note that this political map was not approved until after the November 2021 election of Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin. With the addition of Isle of Wight County, Franklin, Suffolk, and parts of Chesapeake and Southampton, the localities of Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Williamsburg, and James City and York counties are no longer included in the 2nd district. Populous, more urban cities of Newport News and Norfolk were replaced by Isle of Wight and Accomack counties, which are more rural and have populations of less than 40,000 respectively. For example, The majority of Isle of Wight residents voted for the Republican presidential candidate in every election since 1984 and

Accomack County has a similar voting pattern, voting for the Republican candidate in every presidential election since 1980, with the exception of the 1996 presidential election (Leip 2019).

VA-2 is one of the nation's most competitive districts and one of the few swing districts left in the country (Cook Political Report 2022). It also happens to be the congressional seat in Virginia that has seen the highest number of women serving as officeholders, and women from both parties have held this seat. The first woman elected to this seat is Representative Thelma Drake, a Republican who served from 2005 to 2009 and became the third woman to represent Virginia in Congress after Leslie Byrne (Dem, VA-11) and Jo Ann Davis (Rep, VA-1).

Name	Party	Occupation	Served in Va Gen. Assembly?	Ran against	Won?	Term	Preceded by	Succeeded by
Thelma Drake	R	Realtor	Yes, 1996-2005 House of Delegates (District 87)	Phil Kellam (2006), Glenn Nye (2008)	Yes, no	2005-2009	Ed Schrock (R)	Glenn Nye (D)
Elaine Luria	D	Naval Officer, Small business owner	No	Scott Taylor (2018 and 2020), Jen Kiggans (2022)	Yes, no	2019-2023	Scott Taylor (R)	Jen Kiggans (R)
Jen Kiggans	R	Navy pilot, nurse practitioner	Yes, 2020-2022 Virginia Senate (District 7)	Elaine Luria	yes	2023-present	Elaine Luria (D)	

Figure 1.

Democrat Elaine Luria defeated Republican incumbent Scott Taylor in 2018 and lost in the 2022 election to the third woman to represent VA-2, Republican Jen Kiggans. Representative Drake's political career began when she was elected to the Virginia General Assembly House of

Delegates in 1996, representing the 87th House District (Norfolk and Virginia Beach). She chaired the Housing Study Commission and served on the General Laws; Corporations, Insurance, and Banking; Finance; and Transportation Committees (“Thelma Drake” n.d.). During her term in the U.S. House of Representatives (2005-2009), Drake was assigned to the House Armed Services; Transportation and Infrastructure; Resources; and Education and Workforce Committees. Unlike Drake, who was a realtor before she pursued politics, Elaine Luria was a Surface Warfare Officer for 20 years in the Navy before starting a small business in Norfolk and Virginia Beach. Representative Luria defeated Republican incumbent Scott Taylor in 2018 and 2020 when she ran for reelection, which was likely helped by Joe Biden carrying the district, the first Democrat to do so since 1964 (Oliver 2020). Luria served as the Vice Chair of the Committee on Armed Services and was on the Homeland Security and Veterans’ Affairs Committees. She ran again in 2022 and lost to Republican challenger Jen Kiggans. Similarly to Representative Luria, Kiggans served in the Navy and was a helicopter pilot before becoming an adult geriatric nurse practitioner. In 2019, Kiggans ran for a seat in the Virginia State Senate for the 7th district, running in a competitive election against Democratic state Delegate Cheryl Turpin (Virginia Elections Database, 2019). Representative Kiggans currently serves on the House Armed Services, Natural Resources, and Veterans’ Affairs Committees.

In conclusion, VA-2 is a seat that has flipped from Republican to Democrat, now held by a Republican, and has been the seat that has seen the highest number of elected women candidates. Political ambition is typically identified as a progressive characteristic, so it is important to consider lower levels of office and whether there are women serving at local levels whom might one day seek elected office at the federal level.

Women's Representation in the Virginia General Assembly

The Virginia House of Delegates Districts in Hampton Roads include Districts 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, and 95 and the Senate Districts include Districts 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8. The first African American woman elected to the Virginia House of Delegates and to serve in both houses of the Virginia General Assembly was Yvonne B. Miller, a Democrat who represented the Norfolk area beginning in 1983 and until her death in 2012. Senator Miller also taught in the Norfolk Public School system and was a professor and head of the Department of Early Childhood/Elementary Education at Norfolk State University. Chief among Senator Miller's issue interests were education and minority rights and in 2010, with Louise Lucas, patroned a Senate resolution that recognized the Nottoway as one of Virginia's remaining Native American tribes. After her death in 2012, Senator Miller was named among the African American Trailblazers in Virginia history, along with Civil Rights activists James Farmer and Irene Amos Morgan (African American Trailblazers n.d).

Out of the 38 women currently serving in the 2023 Virginia General Assembly, seven women represent Hampton Roads in Virginia's House of Delegates. Two of these delegates, Anne Ferrell Tata (HD 82) and Karen Greenhalgh (HD 85) are Republicans whose districts are located in the Virginia Beach area. Delegate Tata's father-in-law, a Republican, previously served as the delegate for HD 85, as well as previous VA-2 Republican Representative Scott Taylor, who lost to Elaine Luria in 2018. Delegates Tata and Greenhalgh have backgrounds in business, Tata a former sales representative, and Greenhalgh a small business owner. The longest-serving female delegate of the seven in Hampton Roads is Delegate Jeion Ward (HD 92). Delegate Ward is a middle school teacher and has represented HD 92 since 2004. District 92 is a strongly Democratic area comprised of Hampton and parts of Newport News. Delegate Cia Price

is currently serving her fourth term representing District 95, made up of parts of Newport News. Delegate Price also works as the Director of the Virginia Black Leadership Organizing Collaborative (VA BLOC), a non-profit that works to build empowered communities through voter engagement and civic involvement (“About Marcia” n.d.). Also representing Newport News is Delegate Shelly Simonds, a former educator and school board member currently representing District 94. Delegate Jackie Glass, a Navy veteran and social entrepreneur, oversees operations of Mamas on the Block (MOB), a civic action organization for mothering women alongside her work representing Norfolk. Also serving the people of Norfolk in the Virginia House of Delegates is Delegate Angelia Williams Graves, a former Norfolk City Council member and Vice-Mayor of Norfolk (“About Angelia Williams Graves, n.d).

Of the seven women delegates from Hampton Roads, two have had previous experience in an elected position (School Board, City Council), and two have worked as teachers (Simonds and Ward). In comparing the women representatives in the House of Delegates districts in Hampton Roads and the women who have represented VA-2, we see opposite patterns. All of the VA-2 women representatives are white, and two are Republicans. In the Virginia House of Delegates, two of the seven women representing Hampton Roads are Republican, and three are white. Hampton Roads has bipartisan representation in the state legislature and in Congress, but VA-2 has yet to see a Black woman hold the seat.

Conclusion

Although increased women's representation lends legitimacy to our political institutions, we fail to see gender parity in every level of government and especially in the South, a region historically unwelcoming to people other than white men. Hampton Roads, Virginia is a diverse, growing area that is home to many women state legislators. Virginia's 2nd congressional district is especially interesting in looking at women who decide to run. Democrat Elaine Luria held VA-2's seat in the House of Representatives from 2019-2023, losing to Republican Jen Kiggans in 2022. In my research, I found that VA-2 and the corresponding Virginia General Assembly districts have proven fruitful for Republican and Democratic candidates in Congress. VA-2, a swing district, has seen the most women serve as its representative. At the state level, state legislative districts in this area have seen frequent Democrat and Republican officeholding and candidacy from women, including Black women among Democrats. These findings are significant in understanding women's representation and the manifestations of descriptive, symbolic, and substantive representation and the effects this has on communities. The South's changing demographics lend themselves to see similar patterns that Virginia has—more women and women of color candidates and officeholders. Due to the success of women in VA-2 at the state and federal levels, it behooves political parties to endorse and support women candidates and officeholders to reach gender parity. Future research could examine the campaign finances of women candidates in the Hampton Roads area and the activities of both parties that seek to promote women candidates.

References

- “About Angelia Williams Graves.” n.d. AWG for SENATE. Accessed April 9, 2023.
<https://angeliawilliamsgraves.com/about-angelia-williams-graves>.
- “About Marcia.” n.d. Wwww.pricefordelegate.com.
https://www.pricefordelegate.com/about_marcia.
- Atkinson, Frank B. *Virginia in the Vanguard: Political Leadership in the 400-Year-Old Cradle of American Democracy, 1981-2006*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.
- Brown, Nadia E., et al. “Racial Identity, Symbolic Legislation and the Benefit of Black Representatives in the Statehouse.” *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 42, 2018, pp. 136–146.
- Bullock III, Charles S., Susan A. MacManus, Jeremy D. Mayer, and Mark J. Rozell. *The South and the Transformation of U.S. Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019, pp. 21-49.
- Burrell, Barbara C. *Gender in Campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives*. The University of Michigan Press, 2015.
- Carroll, Susan J., and Kira Sanbonmatsu. *More Women Can Run: Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Dittmar, Kelly, et al. *A Seat at the Table: Congresswomen's Perspectives on Why Their Presence Matters*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Dittmar, Kelly. *Navigating Gendered Terrain: Stereotypes and Strategy in Political Campaigns*. Temple Univ. Press, 2015.
- Dolan, Kathleen A. *When Does Gender Matter?: Women Candidates & Gender Stereotypes in American Elections*. NY, 2014.
- Elder, Laurel. *The Partisan Gap: Why Democratic Women Get Elected but Republican Women Don't*. New York University Press, 2021.
- Lassiter, Matthew D., et al. *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, pp. 167–188.

Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard Logan Fox. *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Leip, David. 2019. "Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections." Uselectionatlas.org. 2019. <https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/>.

Lewis, Earl. *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*. University of California Press, 1991.

Manento, Cory, and Marie Schenk. "Role Models or Partisan Models? The Effect of Prominent Women Officeholders." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2021, pp. 221–242., <https://doi.org/10.1017/spq.2020.3>.

Murphy, Ryan. "People Moving out of Norfolk Public Housing Are Mostly Ending up in Other Poor, Racially Segregated Areas." *The Virginian-Pilot*, 14 Feb. 2021.

Nemerever, Zoe, and Daniel Butler. "The Source of the Legislative Professionalism Advantage: Attracting More Knowledgeable Candidates." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2020, pp. 416–436., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532440020930709>.

Oliver, Ned, November 5, 2020. "Chesterfield and Lynchburg Hadn't Backed a Democrat for President since 1948. Biden Changed That." *Virginia Mercury*. November 5, 2020. <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2020/11/05/chesterfield-county-hadnt-backed-a-democrat-for-president-since-1948-biden-changed-that/>.

Osborn, Tracy, et al. *Ideology and Polarization Among Women State Legislators*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 2019.

Ruane, Michael E. "Virginia Is the Birthplace of American Slavery and Segregation - and It Still Can't Escape That Legacy." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 6 Feb. 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/02/06/virginia-is-birthplace-american-slavery-segregation-it-still-cant-escape-that-legacy/>.

Stauffer, Katelyn E. "Public Perceptions of Women's Inclusion and Feelings of Political Efficacy." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 115, no. 4, 2021, pp. 1226–1241., <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055421000678>.

Tarter, Brent. *Gerrymanders: How Redistricting Has Protected Slavery, White Supremacy, and Partisan Minorities in Virginia*. University of Virginia Press, 2019.

“The History of Fort Monroe.” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/fomr/learn/historyculture/index.htm>.

Thomas, Jeffrey B. *The Virginia Way: Democracy and Power after 2016*. History Press, 2019.

Thomsen, Danielle M., and Aaron S. King. “Women’s Representation and the Gendered Pipeline to Power.” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 114, no. 4, 2020, pp. 989–1000., <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055420000404>.

“Virginia Elections Database» 2019 Senate of Virginia General Election District 7.” n.d. Virginia Elections Database. Accessed April 7, 2023. <https://historical.elections.virginia.gov/elections/view/135843/>.

“Virginia General Assembly.” *Ballotpedia*, 2022, https://ballotpedia.org/Virginia_General_Assembly.

Volden, Craig, et al. “Women’s Issues and Their Fates in the US Congress.” *Political Science Research and Methods*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2016, pp. 679–696., <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2016.32>.

Weisman, Jonathan. “Mark Warner, a ‘Business Guy’ Democrat, Lands Back in the Fray.” *The New York Times*, July 15, 2021, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/15/us/politics/mark-warner.html>.