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Latinas in Congress: Lack of Party Support and Disproportionate Underrepresentation

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Political Science (Honors)

Dr. Rosalyn Cooperman

University of Mary Washington

Spring 2020

## Introduction

The Latinx community<sup>1</sup> is the fastest growing demographic in the United States, accounting for more than half of the United States' population growth from 2008 to 2018, and making up roughly 18.3 percent of the population as of 2019 (Flores, Lopez, and Krogstad, 2019). As their numbers increase so does their political influence as a voter base, and many candidates as well as political parties have sought to secure the Latinx vote in elections (Desipio, 2006). The current political environment has a significant impact on the Latinx community in the United States, with recent rhetoric surrounding immigration and building a wall under the Trump Presidency creating a hostile environment for Latinx in the U.S. As of 2018, 55 percent of Latinx in the United States regardless of legal status worry that they, a family member, or someone they know will be deported (Lopez et.al., 2019). Additionally, about one-third of U.S. Latinx are either immigrants themselves, or their parents are immigrants (Lopez, et.al., 2019). It is now more relevant than ever that Latinx as a political constituency are represented in the United States government, as they are directly connected to the effects of anti-immigrant rhetoric and the impact it has on Latinx and immigrant communities. Immigration policy is a major issue in the United States today, and it also is of special relevance to Latinx voters.

As candidates for elected office, Latinas in particular run strong campaigns, with research showing that when they do run for office, they win (Bejarano, 2014: 134). In fact, Latinas are positioned better than their male counterparts, and are rated as having higher candidate qualities (Holman & Schneider, 2018; Ocampo & Ray, 2019). As women, Latina candidates offer unique perspectives on Latinx issues, some in particular that Latino men are unable to speak to, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Latinx is the gender-neutral term to refer to people of Latin-American heritage, and I use it throughout this paper to refer to the Latin American community within the United States.

the challenges that Latinas face in domestic violence cases. Specifically, Latina victims fear reporting their assaults due to anticipation of language barriers, and threats of deportation by their perpetrators or law enforcement (Barcaglioni, 2010). Despite the increase in Latinx in the U.S. and their relative strength as candidates, research shows that Latinx as a population are disproportionately underrepresented in the United States' Congress, holding just eight percent of Congressional seats this year (Gangitano, 2018; "Hispanic Heritage Month", 2019). Surprisingly, the numbers are more disproportionate for Latinas, as they hold just two percent of Congressional seats this term, and represent just 10 percent of the 127 women serving in Congress (Facts on Women, 2019; "Record Number of Latinos", 2019). In addition, the increase of women and minorities in Congress over the last decade has largely been isolated under the Democratic Party, with the majority of Latinx running for office for the Democratic Party (Bialik, 2019; Vital Statistics, 2019).

In this paper I analyze Latina underrepresentation in the United States House of Representatives by examining House primary elections over several election cycles to assess whether political parties gatekeep Latinas out of the general election, and how or whether party affiliation affects Latina candidate success. Extant research has considered the underrepresentation of women, women of color, and minorities in Congress, but has largely overlooked the experience of Latinas specifically. Research on Latinas' political success has examined candidate emergence, participatory orientations such as Latina's voting behavior and political community involvement, and voter perception among the Latinx and non-Latinx voter bases. These research efforts have produced mixed findings.

Candidate emergence studies have sought to explain the supply-side of Latina candidacies, and have found that Latinas like most women generally have lower political ambition than men

(Holman & Schneider 2018), however participatory orientation studies have concluded that Latinas are more involved in local politics than men (Holman, 2016; Garcia, 2016; Gonzalez and Affigne, 2016). Voter perception studies have mixed results but generally conclude that voters prefer white men, white women, or Latino men compared to Latina candidates (Cargile, 2016). A large body of research covers the effects of intersectionality on Latina candidates' electoral successes, with mixed results showing advantages and disadvantages of the cross between race and gender (Bejarano 2014; Cargile, Merolla, and Schroeder, 2016; Hellwege and Sierra, 2016). Another area of research observes Latina officeholder behavior post-election emphasizing the great successes of Latina officeholders in light of continuing discrimination (Bejarano, 2016; Gonzalez and Affigne, 2016; López, 2016). A final area of research covers supply versus demand theory, which suggests that either Latinas are self-selecting themselves out of running for office, or they are not being recruited and receiving enough support from the party (Holman & Schneider, 2018).

My research looks at the crossover between supply and demand theory, and whether party affiliation could be a major influence in both supply and demand-side factors for the underrepresentation for Latina House candidates. I find that there are significant partisan-gaps present in where Latina House primary candidates run and are successful, which is key for understanding the impact partisanship might have for future Latina candidates. This project contributes meaningfully to what we know about the electoral experience of Latina congressional candidates and includes recommendations for what parties can and should consider when encouraging Latinas to run for elected office. Before turning attention to the experience of Latina candidates, however, it is important to first examine various research themes in women's political candidacy that explains women's underrepresentation more broadly.

## Previous Research on Women's Political Candidacy

### *Supply and Demand*

A central theme in women's candidate emergence considers whether the shortage of women candidates is a function of supply of women candidates or a lack of demand for them. Holman and Schneider (2018) define the supply side as women's choice not to run for elected office because of household duties, and careers they view as un conducive to politics. They define the demand side as the entities involved in recruiting and supporting candidates within the political party operation. While they find that framing women's capacity to run in supply-side terms has a dampening effect on women's political ambition, and framing it in demand-side terms increases their ambition, both treatments were found to be ineffective for Latinas. They also found that Latinas have lower levels of political ambition than Latino men overall, and claim this could be a result of the lack of scholarship there is on "non-elite" Latinas. Based on the finding that Latinas have lower levels of political ambition, it is possible that they are self-selecting themselves out of electoral candidacy; however, other research suggests demand-side factors are responsible for discounting Latina candidates (Ocampo & Ray, 2019).

According to Ocampo and Ray (2019), many factors affect minorities and women's decisions to run, such as co-ethnic district population and the strategic decisions of political parties and elites, which plays into the bulk of research that concludes minorities and women only run when they think they are likely to win. They find that potential Latinx candidates make a decision to run based on other challengers that would be running against them in the primary, whereas non-Latinx candidates are not as discouraged by this same consideration. The strategic decisions of Latinx candidates in choosing to run for political office therefore potentially diminishes their candidate pool, and can lessen the amount of Latinx who run for office compared to non-Latinx

candidates. However, their strategic choices may strengthen their chances of winning when they do run, because they choose races where they think they are more likely to win. In this respect, Latinx candidates can be seen self-selecting themselves out of races, or winning more races compared to their non-Latinx competitors due to their strategic decision-making. This research again points to a supply side explanation for women's and Latinas' underrepresentation.

Unfortunately for women and most Latinx, Ocampo and Ray (2019) also find that the recruitment process for new candidates largely excludes them because they are not typically found in the candidate recruitment circles made up of largely white men. Due to this biased recruitment process, the parties have made several inconsistent attempts to increase diversity in their candidate selection at the local level, which is a demand side argument. Over the last few decades, the Democratic Party has been more involved in recruiting Latinx candidates, and after the 2012 Presidential election, the Republican National Committee released a new Growth and Opportunity Project which had two sections focused on recruiting women and Latinx in particular (Ocampo & Ray, 2019; Republican National Committee, 2012). Despite these efforts, the current Republican Party climate under President Trump has “espoused hostile anti-Latino rhetoric and supported anti-immigrant policies” which undoubtedly have affected the increase in Latinx running under the Republican Party label (Ocampo & Ray, 2019: 5). They find that Latinx candidates are less likely to run if they are going to face a challenger in the primary and that Latinx are under-supported by their parties when they do run for primaries. They measure this by looking at support from sitting legislators in their party, which serves as an indicator as to the overall lack of support from their party system.

Ocampo and Ray (2019) also highlight prior research that points to how elite partisan networks and party support serve critical roles in the success of candidates, and since Latinx are

not receiving this support, their success rates are disproportionate compared to other groups. They find that the discouragement Latinx face when anticipating a challenger in the primaries is only increased when partisan networks are not there to support them, and this leads to their further self-selection out of the race for candidacy. They also note that after women are recruited by parties, they receive minimal support which adds to the skepticism and discouragement to run. In sum, research that considers women's political candidacy from a supply and demand argument reveals a double disadvantage for Latina candidates – they tend to self-select out of political candidacy on the supply-side, and parties are often reluctant to openly court Latinas to run on the demand-side.

#### *Participatory orientations of Voters and Women's Candidacy*

Scholars agree that the gender gap between Latino men and women in elected office is smaller than the gender gap between their Caucasian counterparts, yet Latinas still hold significantly fewer seats than Latinos (Ramírez and Burlingame, 2016; Gonzalez and Affigne, 2016). Due to this contradiction, some scholars have looked into Latina versus Latino political participatory orientations as citizens. For instance, Latinas are found to vote at higher rates than Latinos, and are more involved in more participatory forms of politics instead of institutional or power-related participation than men (Holman, 2016). Additionally, Latinas tend to focus their political energy on local-level community-style engagement (Garcia, 2016; Gonzalez and Affigne, 2016). An important finding is that although Latinas and Latinos have similar levels of political efficacy meaning they believe their participation in government matters, Latinas have less trust in the equality of the United States' government as a system (Garcia, 2016). This distrust in the government despite their belief that their individual participation matters could discourage Latinas from running for office and therefore contribute to explaining the gender gap among Latinas and



Latinos. As a voter base Latino men and women tend to vote at lower rates than black and white voters, but Latinas vote at higher rates than Latinos do (Holman, 2016). Economic resources do not affect Latina's voter participation, as research shows that low-income and high-income Latinas vote at similar rates (Holman, 2016). Overall, Latinas have been found to engage in more community-level politics than Latinos, which is an advantage for their political experience, but also a potential factor in their self-selection out of the race for political office since Latinas are less interested in positions of power and institutional politics than Latinos.

### *Voter Perception*

Another area of research switches the focus from Latinx voters to American voters' perceptions of Latinx candidates. Cargile (2016) conducted a study to see how respondents viewed Latina candidate competency on traditionally masculine and feminine policy issues. She found that while Latinx and non-Latinx respondents view the Latina and Latino candidate as similar in competency on feminine issues, non-Latinx view the Latina candidate as less favorable than the non-racially descript feminine candidate (Cargile, 2016). This finding is consistent with the fact that Latina women have been more successful when running in districts with higher Latinx populations (Bejarano, 2016). While Latinx do view Latina women candidates as almost equal to their male counterparts, not many Latinx are registered to vote, which could pose problems for Latina's electoral success especially in districts with smaller Latinx populations. In other words, Latinas are not as likely to succeed in "whiter" districts and may have the additional effect of discouraging them from running.

### *Disadvantages Versus Advantages of Intersectionality*

Other research is concerned with whether Latinas have an advantage or disadvantage over Latinos due to the intersectionality of their race and gender. In a laboratory experiment concerned with gendered social and political issues, it appears Latinas are doubly disadvantaged due to the intersection of their race and gender; however, when looking at appeal to voter bases based on descriptive characteristics, Bejarano finds that Latinas are advantaged due to the intersection of their race and gender (Bejarano, 2014). In an experimental study, participants assessed the competency of different candidates on gender-associated traits in which candidates only varied by gender and race (Cargile et.al, 2016). Latinas were perceived as low on masculine trait factors, which are typically associated with leadership positions, and thus could make their electoral battle more difficult (Cargile et.al, 2016). The double element of the disadvantage is that Latinas are not perceived as having more feminine traits as a result of their race being associated with more feminine qualities, even though Latinos are perceived as having more feminine traits due to their race (Cargile et.al, 2016). While white women are perceived as having positive feminine qualities, and Latino men are perceived as having a positive masculine and feminine qualities, Latina women are not seen as possessing either, putting them at a disadvantage as candidates (Cargile et.al, 2016).

While the double disadvantage has been found to affect Latinas in regards to masculine versus feminine traits and policy issues, some researchers find that Latinas benefit from their intersectionality allowing them to appeal to two major voter coalitions, women and Latinx (Bejarano, 2014; Monforti and Gershon, 2016; Hellwege and Sierra, 2016). By utilizing intersectionality to their advantage, Latina candidates are situated to do better in elections than both Latinos and white women (Hellwege and Sierra, 2016).

The advantage of intersectionality is illustrated by the finding that Latinas are even more successful than their male counterparts when running in districts with higher co-ethnic populations (Holman & Schneider, 2018). This means that Latinas fare better in elections where districts consist mostly of Latinx voters. Latinas also have more instances of higher candidate qualities such as better education, better occupations, more previous political experience, higher campaign contributions, and more leadership experience (Bejarano, 2014). Bejarano points to other reasons that Latinas perform better in elections than Latinos, including the softening of perceived racial threat, where white voters will feel less of a racial threat due to Latinas' gender. Latinas also appeal to a broader range of voter coalitions due to their racial and gender identities (Bejarano, 2014). Even though Latinas are positioned to do better, and are more successful than their male counterparts in local districts with higher Latinx populations and Hispanic-owned businesses, they still hold fewer seats than Latinos (Bejarano, 2014). One finding that could explain this gap is that Latinas anticipate larger gender-based barriers in running for office than Latinos (Bejarano, 2014). As mentioned earlier, other researchers have looked into supply versus demand theory to see whether Latinas are self-selecting out of the race as candidates (Holman & Schneider, 2018). Despite the factors encouraging Latinas to self-select out of their candidacies, many have nonetheless run and won their races. As such, it's important to consider the experience of Latinas who occupy elected office and what their presence means for prospective Latina candidates.

### *Latinas in Office*

Research looking at successful Latina officeholders finds that Latinas in state elected office are typically found in southwestern legislatures, come from single-member districts, have legislature positions with no term limits, and are under the Democratic party label (Bejarano,

2016). Latina elected officials have also been shown to place a high emphasis on the importance of participation in civic activities, having a positive role model in their lives, having a sense of connection to all Latinx in their communities, and serving as role models for other Latina girls (Gonzalez and Affigne, 2016). Latina women in office still face barriers after being elected, as illustrated by a case study on Leticia Van de Putte, a Texas state senator (López, 2016). Although State Senator Van de Putte specialized in Texas education, had 24 plus years of seniority in the legislature, and carried legislation concerning the education of low-income and language minority students, she was not chosen to be a member of the Select Committee on Public School Accountability to revamp the state's education system (López, 2016). This egregious example suggests that Latinas, though abundantly qualified, can face discrimination when vying for leadership positions within their own institution.

#### *Party Differences in the Recruitment and Support of Latina Candidates*

With a few notable exceptions (Hellwege and Sierra, 2016), research has generally ignored how party affiliation interacts with Latinas electoral success even though significantly more Latinas in office are Democrats as opposed to Republicans. Historically, both Latinx and women voters have been associated with the Democratic Party, particularly in terms of voter bases assuming Latinx candidates are liberal, in the context of Latinx family socialization, women's self-identification with the Democratic Party, and related social issues (Cargile et.al., 2016; Hellwege and Sierra, 2016; Barnes and Cassese, 2017). These findings present an interesting research question as to whether Latina women have higher rates of electoral success when running under the Democratic Party label than similarly situated Latinas running under the Republican Party, and how their success compares to their Latino counterparts.

Historically the Democratic Party has taken more efforts to recruit and support Latinx candidates, but as stated earlier, after the 2012 presidential election, the Republican National Committee released a report detailing their plans to incorporate diverse groups and change the party message (Ocampo & Ray, 2019; Republican National Committee, 2012). Despite these earnest efforts by the Republican Party, there has not been a significant increase in Republican Latinx elected to office.

Party recruitment plays a significant role in the success of candidates, especially for women (Butler & Preece, 2016). They found that only 22 percent of women who run come up with the idea themselves, with the remainder running because someone suggested it or encouraged them to. In addition, women get recruited less often and less vigorously than men, meaning less women than men overall are disposed to run for office. Even when women are recruited, they respond less positively and believe that party resources will be disproportionately shared among themselves and their male counterparts; a belief that is exacerbated among Republican female candidates in particular. Women's perceptions that the party will not provide them with equivalent resources as they do for men is more than just a gut feeling, as it has been shown that the parties have a strong bias to favoring men's leadership over women's, even when the strength of their leadership is equivalent (Piscopo, 2019). In fact, "Parties give women fewer financial resources, restrict their access to the media, and treat them as tokens, raising their financial and emotional costs" (Piscopo, 2019: 820). For Latinas as minority women, the odds only get worse (Piscopo, 2019). For elections in the United States from 2012 to 2014 only 5 percent of ballots had one woman of color, compared to 90 percent of ballots that had at least one white candidate (Shah & Juenke, 2019). In sum, Latinas are likely to suffer from supply and demand-side disadvantages where Latinas get recruited

less often than men, and are more likely to shy away from running in anticipation of a lack of party support.

Party recruitment and support is incredibly important for the success of candidates, as party support significantly increases resources (Hassell, 2016). Hassell finds that without party support, candidates typically do not have the monetary resources to be able to run a competitive campaign and acquire a competent campaign staff. Candidates who realize they are fighting against the resources of the party tend to drop out in hopes of being able to get party support another year to increase their odds of winning. Candidates who decide to challenge the party risk opportunities for future party support, and tend to lose their general election race as 80 percent of party supported candidates win (Hassell, 2016). Party chairs are integral in determining what candidates will be selected in the general election to represent the party, and given the increased chances of success with party support it is essential that candidates impress Party chairs. Unfortunately for Latinas, Party chairs see Latinx as significantly less likely to win an election, reducing the likelihood they will be chosen solely because of their race (Doherty et.al., 2019). According to a study conducted with Party chairs, simply having a Latinx name makes a candidate 9.8 percentage points less likely to be selected than a candidate with a white name (Doherty et.al., 2019). Clearly Party chairs view Latinx candidates as weak, enough to cost the candidate the primary race, deeming them a risk to the party's success (Doherty et.al., 2019). When compounding this effect with the widespread belief within parties that female and minority candidates are assumed to be more liberal by voters, it suggests that the Republican Party is systematically neglecting to support Latina candidates because of their race and gender (Doherty et.al., 2019).

Latina candidates have the skill and the ability to win elections and are still underrepresented (Bejarano, 2014). On the demand side, party structures and elite networks have

been unsupportive of both Latinx and women as candidates, and recent efforts to fix these discrepancies have fallen short (Ocampo & Ray, 2019). The supply side has illustrated that knowing these barriers lay ahead, Latinos, women, and Latinas as groups tend to self-select themselves out of the race for candidacy in anticipation of a low chance of success (Ocampo & Ray, 2019). More Latinas have run under the Democratic Party as opposed to the Republican Party, and Latinas who are under the Democratic Party label are more likely to win elections (Bejarano, 2014). Given the importance of party recruitment and resources for the success of candidates, these factors suggest that there could be a sizeable difference in how the two parties treat Latina women seeking electoral office, and how these women interpret the parties' stance on their potential candidacy. Taken as a whole, this research on women's political candidacy, and the experiences of Latinas specifically, inform my expectations about the presence of Latina House candidates and the party label under which they run.

## Theory

In light of the aforementioned research, I believe a combination of supply-side and demand-side factors are responsible for the lack of Latinas in political office. I anticipate that Latina House candidates make strategic decisions to run based on their expectations of demand-side factors such as party support and voter behavior, which results in their self-selection out of the race for office. Given that supply-side research establishes that women and minorities are less likely to run for office unless they are recruited or encouraged to run, I expect few Latinas to run in House congressional primaries since women and minorities are largely not included in party recruitment circles (Butler & Preece, 2016; Piscopo, 2019). Additionally, since women, minority candidates, and Latinx as a group specifically are more strategic in their decisions to run for political office, I anticipate that Latinas are less likely to run in primary races that they are unlikely to win and will seek out more partisan friendly districts. As a result, I expect more Republican Latina candidates to run in red districts and more Democratic Latina candidates to run in blue districts.<sup>2</sup>

Due to demand-side factors and the historical associations between Democratic Party values and women and minorities among voters and Party Chairs, I expect more Latinas to run under the Democratic Party label with an expectation of fewer barriers to success. I anticipate that Republican Latina House primary candidates will be doubtful of gaining the Republican Party's support for the general election due to voters' assumptions about their ideologies leaning more left, and will opt out of running. Since more Latinas have run under the Democratic Party label

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<sup>2</sup> Since I am only looking at the experience of Latina House primary candidates, I am unable to directly measure this, as I would need to compare the district partisanship of Latina Democratic and Republican candidates to non-Latina Democratic and Republican candidates for each race type. Unfortunately, this comparison is outside the scope of this thesis, so I will be comparing the experience of Republican Latina candidates directly to Democratic Latina candidates, which reduces the strength of my conclusions for this measure.



and fit the voter mold of more left leaning ideologies, I also expect to see more Democratic Latina candidates winning their House congressional primary races than Republican Latina candidates.

Finally, given the research detailing the advantages and disadvantages of intersectionality for Latina candidates and the experiences of women in political office, I anticipate that most Latina candidates will lose to male competitors as a result of the combination of their race and gender. Considering research demonstrates that voters do not see Latina candidates as possessing masculine qualities which are integral to Republican Party values, and women and minorities are seen as more liberal ideologically, I anticipate more Republican Latina candidates will lose their House primary races compared to Democratic Latina candidates. I do not anticipate many Latinas losing to white women, as white women are also significantly underrepresented in the U.S. House of Representatives and are deterred from running by a lot of the same factors that deter Latinas from running (“Women in the U.S.”, 2020). Therefore, I anticipate few white women will run, and in primary races where they compete against Latinas, I anticipate both white women and Latinas will lose to male competitors.

In terms of race type, political candidates have a better chance of winning in open seat races than running as challengers against incumbents, so I anticipate that more Latina candidates will run in open seat races than as challengers. The opportunity for Latinas to run in open seat races varies, as it depends on how many seats are up in that election cycle and where those seats are located. Some open seats are based in highly partisan districts where the specific candidate matters less than their party affiliation, whereas others are in mixed districts making those open seats winnable for candidates from both parties. I anticipate that most Latina candidates will run in partisan-safe open seat races, with more Democratic Latina candidates running in partisan-safe open seat races compared to Republican Latina candidates, because they are viewed as particularly

left-leaning given the combination of their race, gender, and party label. Republican Latinas potentially have more appeal in battle-ground districts due to the combination of their conservative party label and left-leaning associations as a result of their race and gender, so I anticipate more Republican Latinas will run in battle-ground open seat races than Democratic Latinas.

### Research Design

My project examines Latina political candidacy to the U.S. House of Representatives and the role that political parties play, if any, in their candidacies. I analyze congressional primary election data across four congressional election cycles from 2012 through 2018 in four states. Specifically, I analyze election data from Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas due to their large Latinx populations as a percentage of the state, and their diverse partisan leanings measured by the percentage of votes cast for the Presidential elections in 2012 and 2016. States with high Latinx populations provide a more favorable electoral environment for Latinas, as research shows they perform better in districts with larger Latinx populations (Bejarano, 2016). Therefore, Latinas who run in House districts in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas have greater chances of success than Latinas who run in other states with smaller Latinx populations.

I have chosen 2012 through 2018 because it represents two presidential election years followed by two congressional midterm election years with vastly different partisan outcomes. Examining multiple election cycles allows for generalization beyond a specific favorable or unfavorable partisan electoral context, as it is well established that presidential midterm election cycles are unfavorable for the Presidential Party in power (Hinckley, 1967; Campbell, 1966; Campbell, 1993; Erikson, 1988). I use the percentage of the vote received in the state and also in

each congressional district by the Democratic presidential candidate in 2012 and 2016 to determine state and congressional district partisanship. Tracking district partisanship allows me to identify whether Latina candidates run in friendly or less partisan friendly districts, and if there's a difference among Republican Latina candidates and Democratic Latina candidates. It also allows me to better understand the partisanship of the districts in which Latinas run as incumbents, challengers, and for open seats. I look at districts and races where Latinas both won and lost to determine what conclusions we might reach about where Latinas are running and winning, and where they are running and losing, particularly as it relates to the role that political parties may play in supporting Latina candidates.

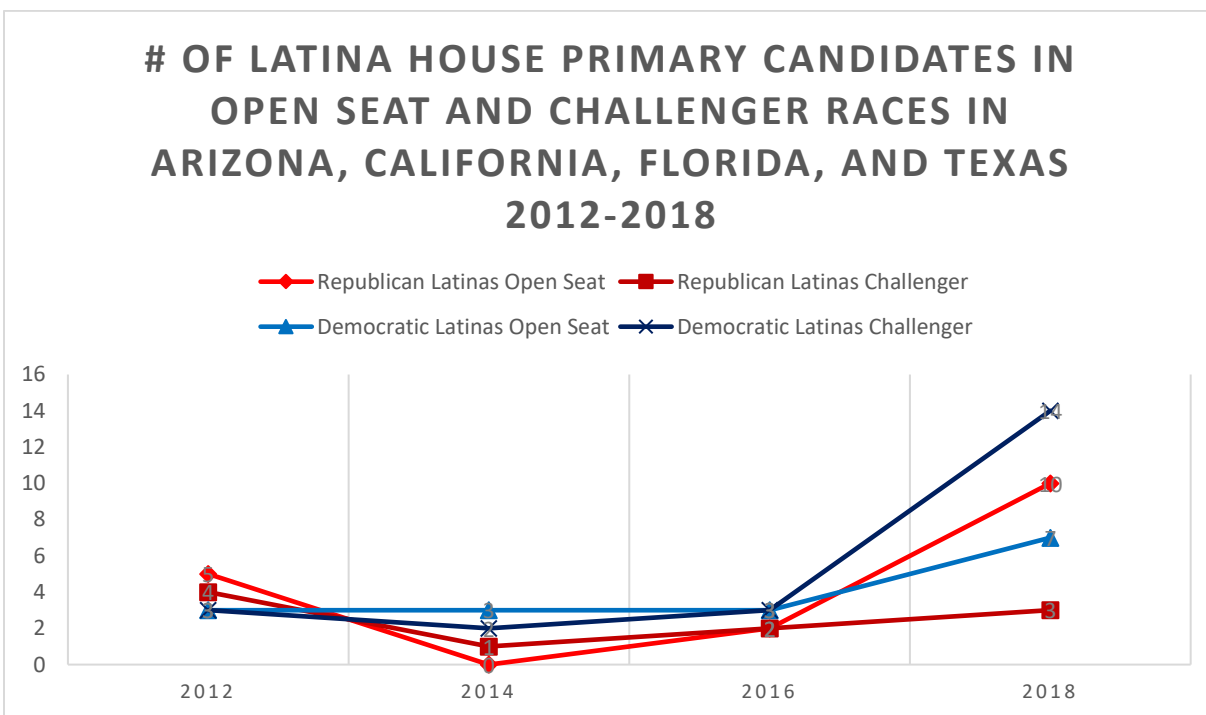
I determined where Latina candidates ran by looking for Latinx surnames on the election fact sheets for each election cycle posted by the *Center for American Women in Politics*, as well as crosschecking names with *Ballotpedia* and *Wikipedia* primary race data for all four cycles.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I could have missed Latina candidates without Latina surnames, and it could be possible that some candidates in my study are not actually Latinas, given that racial/ethnic data was not available for most candidates I found. Therefore, a certain level of error is assumed in my findings.

## Findings

Figure 1 – Latina House Primary Candidates in Open Seat and Challenger Races, 2012-2018



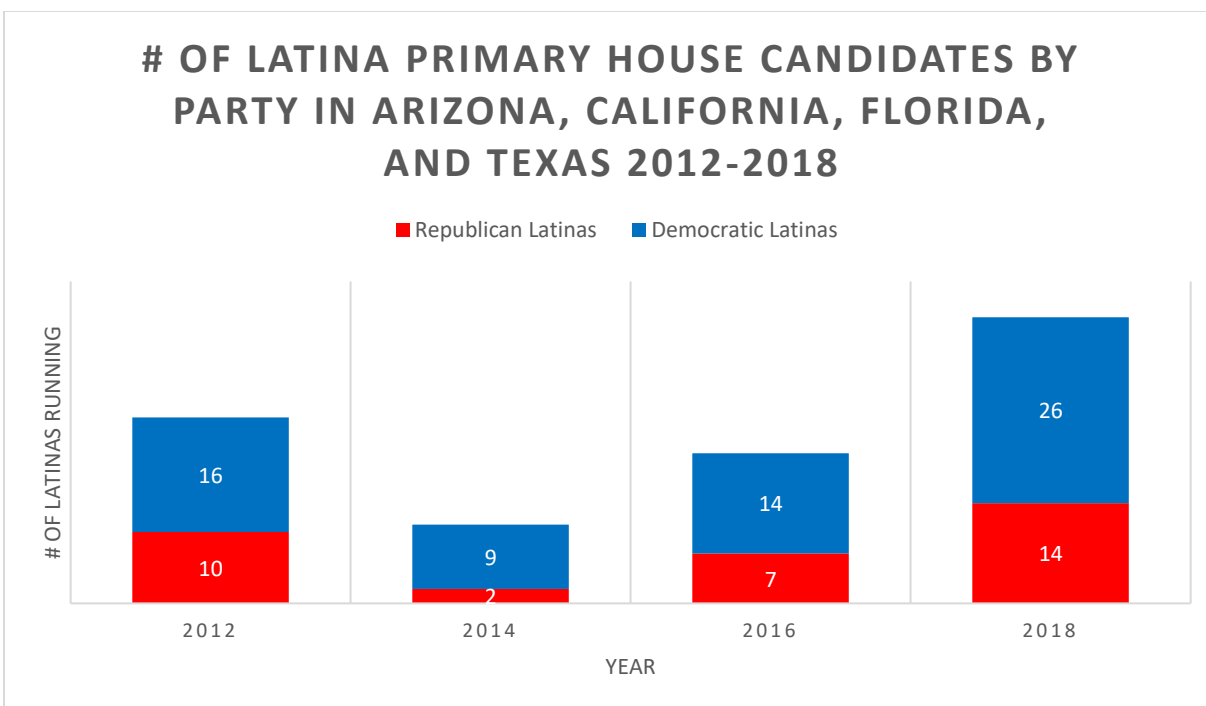
Source: Center for American Women in Politics, candidate totals compiled by author.

In 2012 five Republican Latina candidates ran in open seat House primaries, and four ran as challengers. In 2014 these numbers dropped, with no Republican Latina candidates running in House open seat primaries in 2014, and just one running as a challenger. In 2016 slightly more Republican Latina candidates ran in open seat House primaries and as challengers, with two running in each category. In 2018, the number of Republican Latina candidacies in open seat House primaries soared with 10 candidates, while challengers only picked up one more candidate bringing the total to three. In 2012 only three Democratic Latina candidates ran as challengers in House primaries, and as open seat competitors. Democratic Latina candidates did not increase their

House primary candidacies in 2014, with open seat House contenders remaining at just three, and challengers falling to just two. 2016 leveled Democratic Latina primary House candidates back to three for both open seat races and as challengers, and 2018 brought a significant increase in Democratic Latina candidates in primary House races, with seven running in open seat primaries, and eleven running as challengers.

2012 and 2018 were favorable years for Democratic candidates to run, yet very few Democratic Latinas ran in 2012, and surprisingly few Democratic Latinas ran in open seat races in 2018 despite favorable contexts for Democratic candidates and women of color specifically (Erikson, 1988; Dittmar, 2019). 2014 was a favorable electoral context for Republican candidates, and yet 2014 had the least number of Republican Latinas run out of all four election cycles. The favorable electoral context of 2016 was mixed for candidates in both parties given it was not a presidential midterm election cycle, and as such had characteristically similar numbers of Latinas from both parties running. The 2018 election cycle was characterized by a historic number of women running for office, including an unprecedented number of women of color throwing their hats in the ring (Dittmar, 2019). Despite this, in 2018 fewer Republican Latinas ran as challengers than in 2012, down to three in 2018 from four in 2012 (Figure 1). The increase in women running for Congress in 2018 was concentrated in the Democratic Party, with a 50 percent increase in entries, while Republican women only increased their entries by 26 percent, falling short of their previous high (Dittmar, 2019). Even though more Republican Latinas ran in open seat races in 2012 and 2018 compared to Democratic Latinas, in 2016 more Democratic Latinas ran in open seat races and as challengers, and 73% more Democratic Latina candidates ran as challengers in 2018 than Republican Latina candidates.

Figure 2 – Latina House Primary House Candidates, 2012-2018

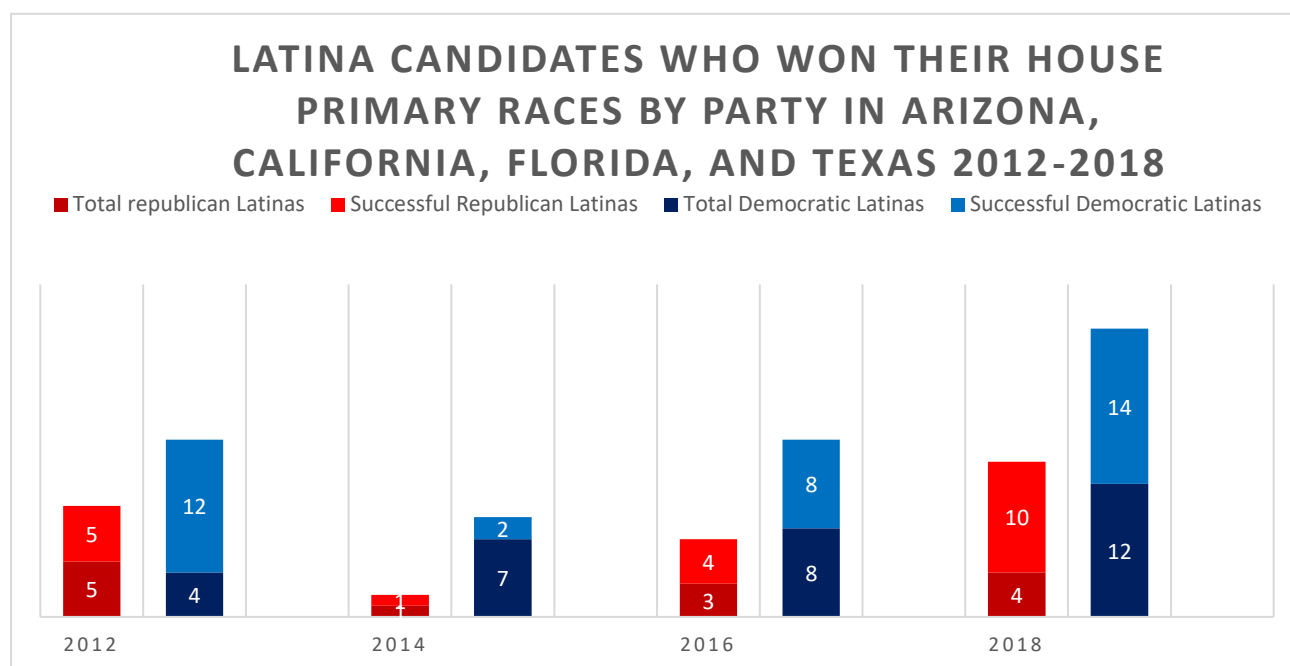


Source: Center for American Women in Politics, candidate totals compiled by author.

As seen in Figure 2 above, sixteen total Democratic Latina candidates and ten total Republican Latina candidates ran in House primaries in 2012 in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. Overall, more Latina candidates ran for the House of Representatives under the Democratic Party than for the Republican Party across all four election cycles in the combined states of Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas, even in 2014 which was a favorable electoral cycle for Republican candidates. In 2018 a record number of women and women of color ran for Congress, and as such has the largest number of Latinas that ran of all four cycles (Caygle, 2018). Despite this, in 2018 the increases in female candidacies was largely isolated within the Democratic Party, which can be seen in Figure 2 where ten more Democratic Latina candidates ran in House primaries, while just four more Republican Latina candidates ran in House primaries (Dittmar,

2019). Figure 3 below illustrates how many Latina candidates in both parties won out of how many ran total that year, and it demonstrates that significantly more Democratic Latina candidates won their primaries compared to their conservative counterparts except for 2012. Additionally, it is clear that there has been an increase in Latina candidate success in the House within the last eight years, however it has been largely confined to the Democratic Party as earlier research suggested.

Figure 3 – Successful Latina House Primary Candidates, 2012-2018

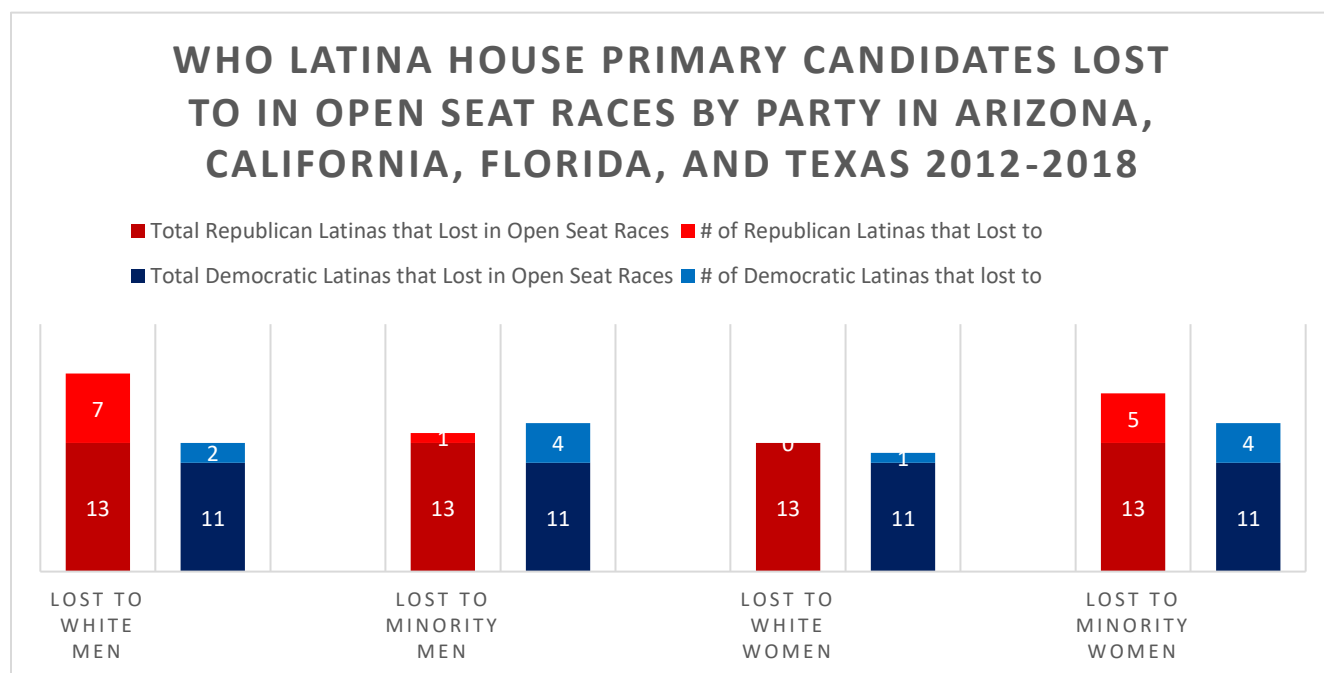


Source: Center for American Women in Politics, candidate totals compiled by author.

When considering why Latinas are not making it past primary elections, it is imperative to determine what types of candidates they are losing to, and if there are any significant patterns in their losses to different demographic groups. Challenger and incumbent races do not offer much insight in parsing out who Latinas lose to because any candidate running as an incumbent is sure

to win, and any candidate running as a challenger against an incumbent is almost certain to lose regardless of demographic breakdown. Therefore, open seat House primary races offer the best measure of who Latina House primary candidates are losing to. Figure 4 is a graphic summary of this measure, broken into four major demographic breakdowns illustrating Latina candidate losses out of total Latina open seat losses by party ideology. The graph shows that significantly more Republican Latinas lost to white men in open seat races than did Democratic Latina candidates. Democratic Latina House primary candidates lost their open seat races to minority men and women the most, with only three in total losing to white men and women candidates.

Figure 4 – Who Latina Candidates Lost to in House Open Seat Primaries, 2012-2018



Source: Ballotpedia, candidate totals compiled by author.



While the graph shows that more Republican Latina House primary candidates lost to minority women than Democratic Latina candidates, this information is skewed as all five of the minority women are other Republican Latinas, four of which competed against each other in the same district and lost to a fellow Latina, and the other who lost to another Latina in a separate district. Five Republican Latina candidates ran in 2018 in Florida's 27<sup>th</sup> district, which favored Democratic Presidential candidates Hillary Clinton in 2016 by a 20 percent margin, and Barack Obama in 2012 by a seven percent margin.<sup>4</sup> In 2018 the House seat for Florida's 27<sup>th</sup> district was an open seat, freed up due to the retirement of Republican Latina incumbent, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen who held the seat since 2013.<sup>5</sup> Since a successful conservative Latina was able to hold the seat for several election cycles, the seat is relatively safe for Republican Latina candidates to run for, and win. Similarly, two of the four minority women that Democratic Latina candidates lost to are other Democratic Latina candidates that competed against each other. Both cases occurred in 2018 in Texas, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> districts which both favored Democratic Presidential candidates Barack Obama in 2012 and Hillary Clinton in 2016 by sizable margins.<sup>6</sup> In Texas' 16<sup>th</sup> district, Democratic incumbent Beta O'Rourke announced he was running for the Senate in 2017, opening up the seat for the 2018 election cycle. Two Democratic Latina candidates ran against each other in the primary in addition to other competitors, where just one emerged victorious with 61.4% of the vote, Veronica Escobar.<sup>7</sup> In Texas' 29<sup>th</sup> district, Democratic incumbent Gene Green announced he was not seeking re-election for 2018, freeing up the seat. Six candidates competed in the

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<sup>4</sup> Leip, 2019a, 2019b. Obtained candidate information on FL District 27 from Ballotpedia.

<sup>5</sup> Obtained information on FL District 27 from Ballotpedia.

<sup>6</sup> Leip, 2019a, 2019b.

<sup>7</sup> Obtained information from TX District 16 from Ballotpedia.

Democratic primary, two of them were Latinas, and one, Sylvia Garcia won the primary with 63.3% of the vote.<sup>8</sup>

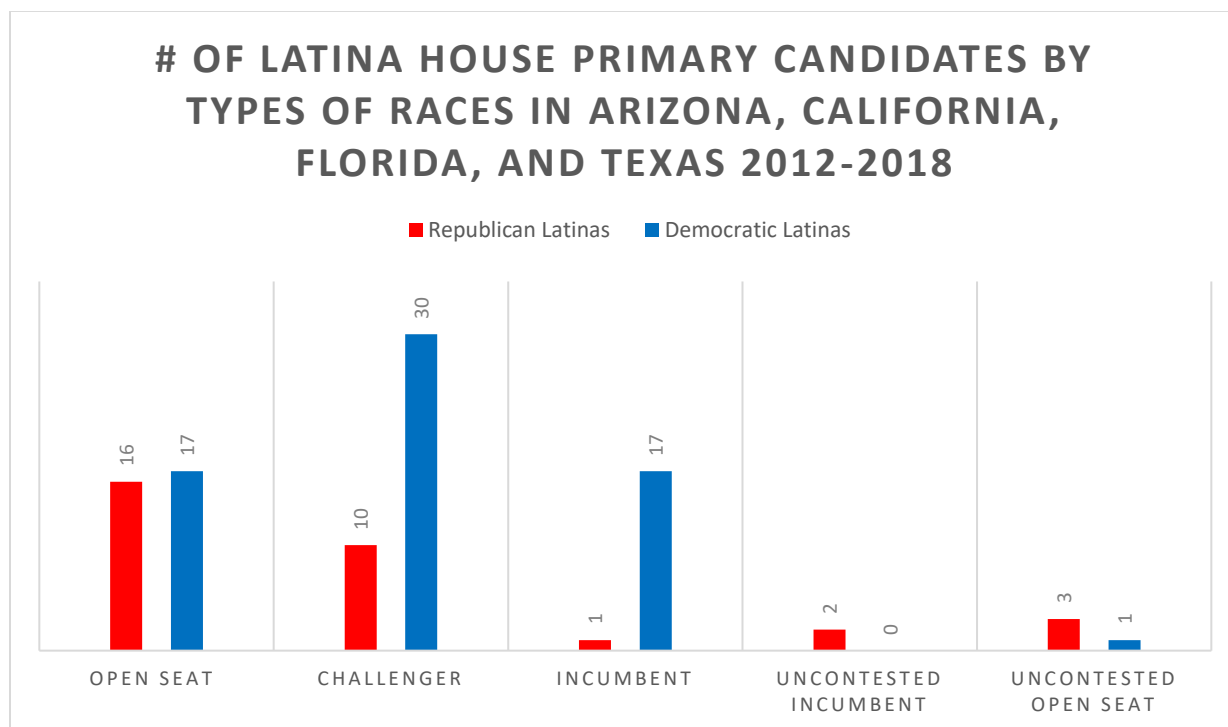
Similarly, 51 Latina House primary candidates, Democrats and Republicans, ran in the same 17 districts. On average, three Latina candidates ran in the same district at one time, with the most running in one district over all four election cycles in Florida's 27<sup>th</sup> district with eight different Latina candidates, with six running in 2018. Seven of the 17 repeat districts had just Democratic Latina candidates, and zero had solely Republican Latina candidates, suggesting that more districts are favorable for Democratic Latinas than for Republican Latinas. 27 of the 51 Latina House primary candidates that ran in the same district ran in 2018, which was a favorable year overall for women of color to run (Dittmar, 2019).

For Latinas in both parties to increase their numbers in office, they have to win their party primaries. Unfortunately, in House primary races in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas, the majority of Republican Latinas lost their open seat primaries to white men in their party, while the majority of Democratic Latina candidates lost their open seat primaries to minority men in their party. This suggests that the intersectionality of Latina candidates' race and gender is problematic for their candidacies, and unless they are running as incumbents, Latina candidates in both parties struggle to win contested party primaries. Additionally, Latina candidates seem to be competing against each other in the same districts, even in a favorable electoral year where they could potentially gain more seats, which suggests certain districts are more friendly to Latina candidates than others.

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<sup>8</sup> Obtained information on TX District 29 from Ballotpedia.

Figure 5 – Latina House Primary Candidates by Race Type, 2012-2018



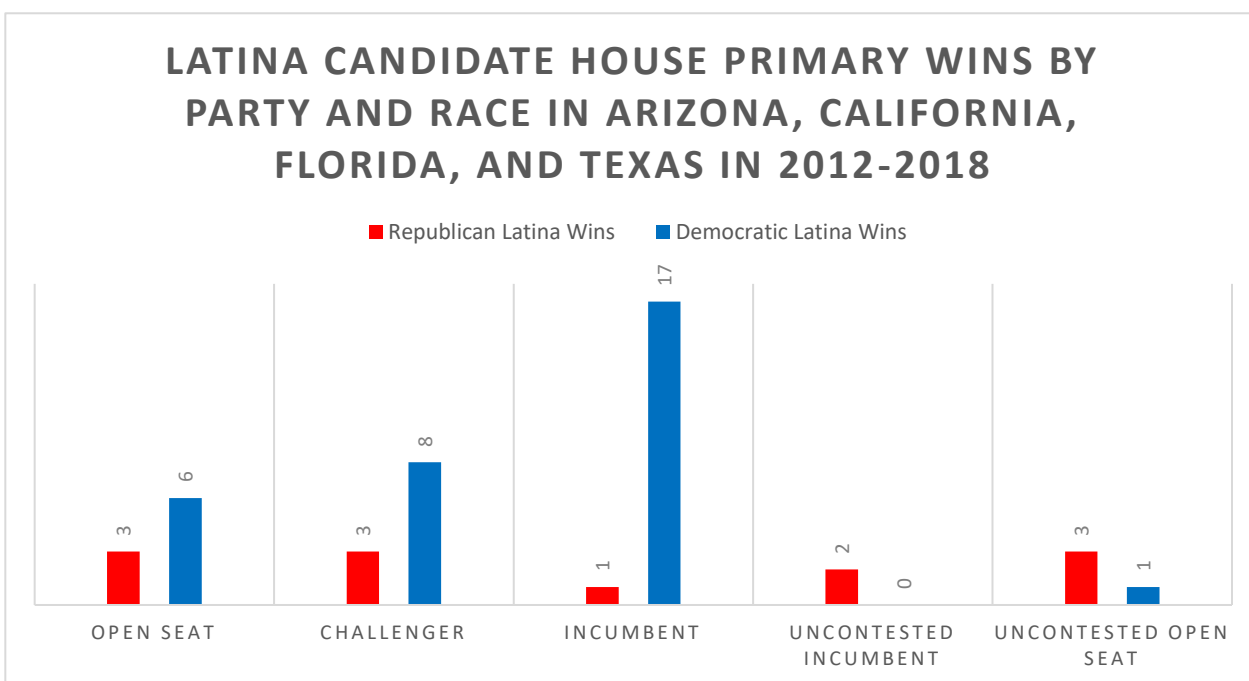
Source: Center for American Women in Politics and Ballotpedia, candidate totals compiled by author.

Of the 33 total Latina candidates that ran under the Republican Party label, only 13 won their House primary races. Of the 16 Republican Latina candidates that ran in open seat House primaries, only three won (Figures 5, 6). Likewise, ten Republican Latina candidates ran as challengers in their primaries and were just slightly more successful, with three Latinas winning their races. One Republican Latina ran as a contested incumbent and won her race as expected, while more Republican Latinas ran as uncontested incumbents and in uncontested open seat races than Democratic Latina candidates. Significantly more Democratic Latina House primary candidates ran as challengers, with 30 running and just eight winning their races. Equal amounts of Democratic Latina candidates ran in open seat races and as incumbents with 17 each, all 17 of

the incumbent Latinas were successful, with just six of the open seat Democratic Latinas winning their races (Figure 5, 6).

As a percentage of total candidates, Republican Latinas ran almost twice as many Latina candidates in open seat races than their liberal counterparts, yet Democratic Latinas won almost double the amount of open seat primaries than Republican Latina candidates (Figures 5, 6). This suggests a partisan gap could be present in Latina candidate success since Democratic Latinas seem to fare significantly better in open seat House primary races than their conservative counterparts.

Figure 6 – Successful Latina House Primary Candidates by Race Type, 2012-2018

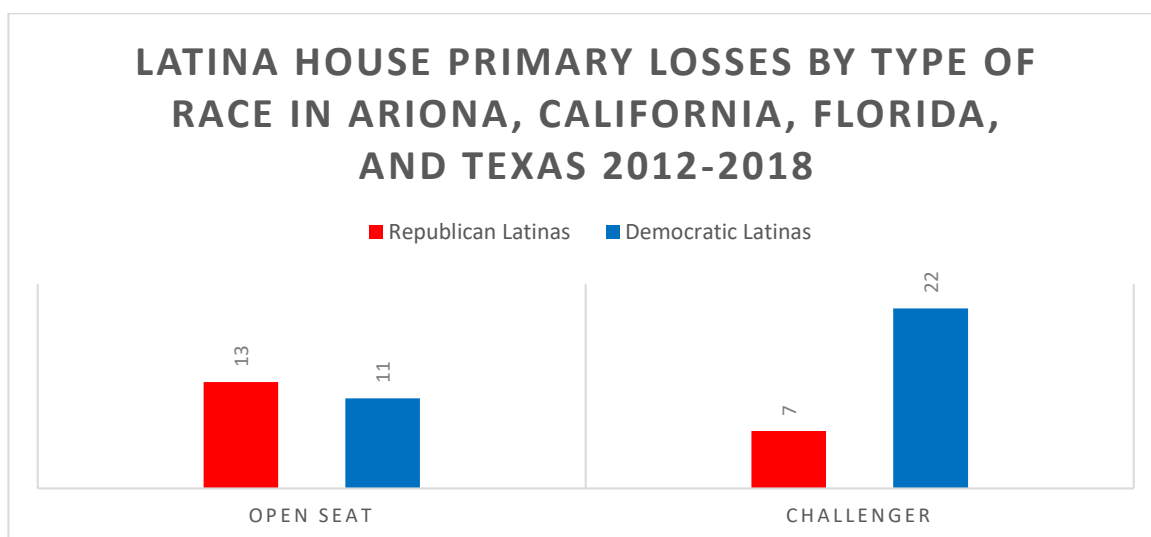


Source: Center for American Women in Politics and Ballotpedia, candidate totals compiled by author.

More Republican Latina candidates won their primary races uncontested, with 38 percent of wins attributed to uncontested races, while just 3 percent of Democratic Latina wins are

attributed to uncontested races. In other words, no other candidate ran against them on the ballot, and they automatically secured a win. Surprisingly, no Democratic Latina House incumbents ran uncontested, and 99 percent of all Democratic Latina House primary candidate races were contested compared to just 62 percent of all Republican House primary races, suggesting that all Democratic House seats for Latinas are highly competitive. This suggests that a potential partisan gap exists among Latina House primary candidates, where Republican Latina candidates fare worse in competitive races than Democratic Latina candidates, and therefore gain the majority of their seats in uncontested races, whether as incumbents or as open seat candidates. Additionally, since Democratic Latina House primary candidates had significantly more contested incumbent candidacies than their conservative counterparts which comprised the majority of their wins, a potential partisan difference in Latina candidate success could exist due to a larger number of Democratic Latina incumbents that already hold a seat in office.

Figure 7 – Latina House Primary Candidate Losses by Race Type, 2012-2018



Source: Center for American Women in Politics and Ballotpedia, candidate totals compiled by author.

Most candidates that run as challengers will lose their races to the incumbent candidate, and most, if not all incumbents will win their races. As a result, open seat races offer the most insight into whether a partisan gap might be present in Latina House primary candidate losses. More Republican Latina House candidates lost in open seat races than Democratic Latina candidates with 13 out of 16 conservative Latinas losing their open seat races, and 11 out of 17 liberal Latinas losing their open seat races (Figure 7). In challenger races slightly more Democratic Latinas lost their House primaries than Republican Latinas, with 22 out of 30 Democratic Latinas losing their challenger races and 7 out of 10 Republican Latinas losing theirs (Figure 7). As a proportion of total primary losses by party, Republican House primary Latina candidates lost the most seats in open seat races with 13 losses out of 20 losses total, and Democratic House primary Latina candidates lost the most seats in challenger races, with 22 out of 34 losses total. This suggests that Republican Latina candidates struggle more in open seat races than Democratic Latina candidates, or are running in more difficult open seat races than Democratic Latina candidates. Looking at district partisanship will help illustrate what kind of open seat races Latina candidates from both parties are running in, and the relative safety of each district.

Surprisingly, 91 percent of Republican Latinas ran in opposing party districts, with 57 percent of them losing those primary races (Figure 8)<sup>9</sup>. Of the few Republican Latinas who ran in red districts, all of them lost their primary races. Comparatively, just 22 percent of Democratic Latinas ran in opposing party districts, with half of them losing those primary races. An

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<sup>9</sup> For this paper, opposing party districts refer to districts that candidates run in where the majority of Presidential general election votes in the district went to the Presidential candidate of the opposing party. In this instance, Republican Latina candidates running in opposing party districts would be running where the Democratic Presidential candidates for 2012 and 2016, Obama and Clinton, won the majority of district votes. Likewise, same party districts refer to districts that awarded more votes in the general election to the Presidential candidate representing the same party as the candidate running, i.e. Republican Latinas that ran in red districts where the majority of district votes went to the Republican Presidential candidates in the general elections of 2012 and 2016, to Romney and Trump respectively.

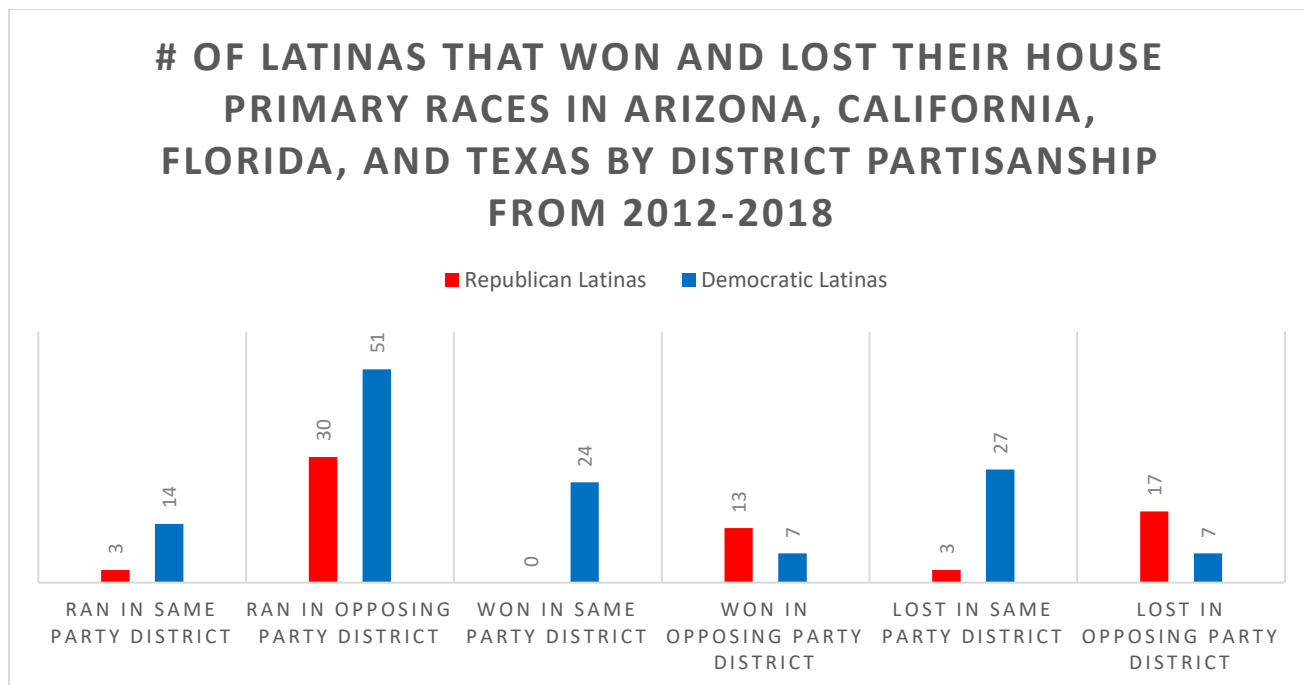
overwhelming majority of Democratic Latinas ran in blue districts, and only 47 percent of them won their primaries. Overall, 83 percent of both Republican and Democratic Latina candidates ran in blue districts. Arizona and Texas were red leaning states for all four election cycles, with both state presidential popular votes in 2012 and 2016 supporting Romney and Trump respectively, yet in both states over all four election cycles only two Republican Latina candidates ran for the Republican nomination in red districts, and both of them lost their races.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, California was a strong blue state for all four election cycles with the state presidential popular vote electing Obama in 2012 and Clinton in 2016, and over all four years 29 Democratic Latinas ran in blue districts, and 20 of them won their races.<sup>11</sup> In other words, despite Arizona and Texas being relatively safe red states for Republican Latinas to run, only two chose to run in similarly safe red districts and they both lost, whereas in California as a safe blue state for Democratic Latinas, had significantly more Latina candidates run in blue districts with 29, and the majority won their House primaries. Clearly a partisan-gap exists among Latina House primary candidacies, where strong partisan districts are not equally as advantageous for Republican Latina candidates as they are Democratic Latina candidates.

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<sup>10</sup> Leip, 2019a, 2019b.

<sup>11</sup> Leip, 2019a, 2019b.

Figure 8 – Latina House Primary Candidates by Race Type, 2012-2018



Source: Center for American Women in Politics and Ballotpedia, candidate totals compiled by author.

Table 9 displays the results of a means test for congressional district partisanship based on the percentage of the vote given to the Democratic Presidential candidate in 2012 and 2016.<sup>12 13</sup> Democratic Latina incumbent candidates had an average district partisanship of 70.2 percent, meaning they ran in very friendly blue districts, and Republican Latina incumbents had an average district partisanship of 57.6 percent, meaning they also ran in strong blue districts. Democratic Latina incumbents ran in significantly more Democratic friendly districts than Republican Latinas

<sup>12</sup> 2012 presidential results used for 2012 and 2014 congressional district partisanship measures; 2016 presidential results used for 2016 and 2018 congressional district partisanship measures.

<sup>13</sup> This means test strictly compares the averages of district partisanship between Democratic and Republican Latina candidates in three different race types and does not take any other factors into consideration. Stronger conclusions could be made if this test was extended to male Latinos in House primary races as well, but is outside the scope of this thesis.



which was found to be statistically significant at a 99 percent confidence level, meaning this finding would hold with 99 percent confidence when applied to all Democratic and Republican Latina House incumbent candidates running in all 50 states from 2012 to 2018. Unfortunately for Republican Latina incumbents, serving in primarily strong blue districts presents them with more challenges from Democratic candidates of any demographic who could potentially take their seats. This happened in 2016 when Republican Latina incumbent Gabriela Saucedo Mercer's House seat in Arizona's blue 3<sup>rd</sup> District flipped to Democratic. Since Democratic Latina incumbents run in safe blue districts, they might lose their seats to other Democrats, but they do not face a similar threat of losing their seat to the other party.

Congressional district partisanship measures were found to be very similar in open seat races and incumbent races for both Democratic and Republican Latina House primary candidates, with Democratic Latinas running in significantly more Democratic friendly districts than Republican Latinas, with averages of 64.8 percent and 56.9 respectively. This finding is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level, meaning in all 50 states from 2012 to 2018 in House open seat primary races with Latina candidates, significantly more Democratic Latinas ran in friendly blue districts than Republican Latinas. While Republican Latina candidates ran in open seat races in Democratic friendly districts, they were more party competitive for Republican candidates which suggests that Republican Latinas running in open seats might face less of a challenge from Democratic candidates than their incumbent counterparts. On the flip side, a competitive district for both parties increases the chances that Republican Latinas will face challengers of all types from both parties, which could drown out their candidacies and reduce their representation. As with Latina incumbents, Democratic Latina candidates running in open

seat races do not face this same disadvantage as Republican Latina candidates, which potentially contributes to the partisan-gap among Latina candidates.

In challenger races, Democratic Latina candidates have a congressional district partisanship average of 51.2 percent, and Republican Latina candidates have a congressional district partisanship average of 63.5 percent. Different from both incumbent and open seat races, Democratic Latinas running as challengers run in more party competitive districts as opposed to friendly blue districts. Republican Latinas continue to run in Democratic friendly districts even as challengers against incumbents. As a Republican challenger running in a strong blue district it is unlikely regardless of demographic that the Republican challenger will win. While Democratic Latina challengers are running in more party competitive districts, they still do not face the same disadvantage as Republican Latina challengers who are competing in seemingly hopeless races. This finding seems to confirm existing research by Burrell suggesting that women candidates are placed into hopeless races, which could serve as a possible explanation for the lack of Latina representation in Congress (Burrell, 1992). This finding is statistically significant and holds at a 99 percent confidence level, meaning that it applies to all House challenger primary races with Latina candidates in all 50 states from 2012 to 2018.

Table 9: District Presidential Partisanship and Latina Congressional Candidates, 2012 - 2018

Party and Type of Race (For Filed Candidates)	Mean % Vote Received by Democratic Presidential Candidate in District, 2012 or 2016
Democratic Latina incumbents**	70.4 (n=17)
Republican Latina incumbents	57.6 (n=3)
Democratic Latinas, open seats*	64.8 (n=17)
Republican Latinas, open seats	56.9 (n=16)
Democratic Latina challengers**	51.2 (n=30)
Republican Latina challengers	63.5 (n=13)

Data compiled by author from official presidential election results.<sup>14</sup>

\*\* significant  $p < .01$

\* significant  $p < .05$

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<sup>14</sup> Means are calculated regardless of whether the woman candidate won her party's primary and instead are meant to capture the districts where women candidates filed to run. Means are significant between Democratic and Republican women within each race type (e.g., Democratic women incumbents to Republican women incumbents).

## Discussion

Despite research demonstrating that Latinas are strong candidates with superior candidate qualities than their male counterparts, Latinas are disproportionately underrepresented in Congress (Bejarano, 2014). Additionally, while women and minority candidates have been increasing their numbers in office, this has been largely isolated within the Democratic Party (Bialik, 2019; “Vital Statistics”, 2019). In order to determine if the Republican Party is under-recruiting and under-supporting Latina candidates, I looked at four Congressional House primary election cycles in four states with differing partisan ideologies and with the highest Latinx population as a percentage of their states. My results indicate there is a significant difference in Latina success by political party, as significantly more Democratic Latinas ran and won their House primaries compared to Republican Latinas, even in red-leaning states and districts during favorable years for Republicans.

Political party organizations play a significant role in candidate recruitment, and without party support, Latina candidates are less likely to run and more likely to anticipate a decreased likelihood of success, resulting in a strategic decision not to run for office. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, more Republican Latinas ran and won their House primaries uncontested compared to Democratic Latina candidates, which suggests that Republican Latina candidates struggle in competitive races, and possibly self-select themselves out of the race when facing contested elections. The finding that the majority of Republican Latina candidates lost in open seat races to white men, and the majority of Democratic Latina candidates lost to male minorities, suggests the intersectionality of Latina candidates’ race and gender is problematic for their candidacies. The implication is that unless they are running as incumbents, Latina candidates in both parties struggle to win contested party primaries. Additionally, Latina candidates seem to be competing against each other in the

same districts, which suggests certain districts are more friendly to Latina candidates than others. This has the potential effect of relegating Latina candidates to certain districts, and could limit their overall representation in office since they could only compete for a limited number of seats against each other.

Despite twice as many Republican Latina candidates running in open seat races, twice as many Democratic Latina candidates won their open seat races compared to their conservative counterparts (Figure 6). Open seat races are known to be less difficult than running against an incumbent candidate, and this is likely why more Republican Latina candidates ran in open seats since they are disadvantaged by the public perception of having more liberal ideologies due to their race and gender. Although less Democratic Latina candidates ran in open seats than Republican Latinas, twice as many won their primaries. In open seat races that are seemingly easier to win, Democratic Latinas still outperform Republican Latinas by twice as much, which suggests that a partisan-gap is present in Latinas' political candidacies. This has the potential to reduce Republican Latina candidacies through supply and demand-side factors.

Just 9 percent of Republican Latina candidates ran as incumbents while 26 percent of Democratic Latina candidates ran as incumbents, which could be an explanation for the existing partisan-gap among Latina congressional officeholders. Democratic Latina candidates have more incumbents in office to date, which secures electoral victories for as long as they continue to run, and could reduce the barriers for future Latinas to run in their districts. In this respect, Republican Latinas are disadvantaged by their lack of incumbent candidates.

A shocking finding is that over 90 percent of Republican Latinas ran in opposing party districts, and of the few who ran in red districts in red states, all of them lost. As seen in Table 9, Republican Latina candidates running as incumbents, challengers, and in open seats consistently

ran in more Democratic friendly districts, which was statistically significant at 95 and 99 percent confidence levels. This suggests that red districts may not be safe for Latina candidates even when they are representing the Republican Party. This could be a result of lower Latinx populations within red districts, a lower proportion of red Latinx voters, or a lack of Latinx voters altogether as earlier research shows less Latinx are registered to vote compared to black and white voters (Holman, 2016). Additionally, the majority of Democratic Latina candidates ran in blue districts, and only 47 percent of them won their house primaries, which is just 4 percent more than the Republican Latinas who won in blue districts. The majority of Democratic Latinas also ran as challengers, so their lower success rate does not necessarily speak to the experience of their candidacies as Latinas specifically, since most candidates generally lose challenger races. Surprisingly more Democratic Latina challengers ran in party competitive districts as opposed to safe blue districts, potentially making their chances of success more difficult due to more competition from both sides of the aisle. An interesting demand-side explanation to this finding is that historically parties have put women in characteristically hopeless races, where they are extremely unlikely to win, which could be a major factor in why the majority of Republican Latinas ran in opposing party districts, and the majority of Democratic Latina candidates ran as challengers to incumbents in more party competitive districts (Burrell, 1992).

More Latina House primary candidates ran as challengers to incumbent candidates in the House primaries in 2018 than in any other election cycle I looked at, which is on par with the evidence commending 2018 as the best year to run for women and minority women candidates, likely giving Latina candidates a stronger base for future party and voter support (Dittmar, 2019). It is important to note that less Republican Latina candidates ran as challengers in 2018 compared to 2012, which demonstrates that although 2018 was a promising year for minority

women candidates, these advantages do not cross partisan lines. Future research should look at general election data for Latina candidates and how it compares with primary race data. Given that political parties have a bigger influence in the general election, it would be easier to see political parties' direct influence on Latinas' candidacies, and if there is a significant partisan-gap in recruiting and supporting Latina candidates. Future research should also extend the means test on congressional district partisanship to male Latino House primary candidates, to directly compare how Latinas fare compared to their male counterparts by race type.

### Conclusion

The experience of Latina political candidates is unique from other demographic groups and has its own partisan differences, and this holds powerful implications for the representative nature of our democracy. It appears that a significant partisan-gap exists in the success of Latina House primary candidates, where Republican Latina candidates are significantly disadvantaged. Historically, women and minorities have been associated with liberal ideologies and more feminine qualities, and as such Republican Latinas do not convey the strong masculine qualities that are so deeply intertwined with Republican Party values (Cargile et.al., 2016). In four different congressional election cycles from 2012 to 2018 in the Latinx dense states of Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas, significantly more Democratic Latina House primary candidates ran than Republican Latina House primary candidates. 2014 in particular presented a favorable electoral context for Republican candidates to run as a midterm presidential election year, yet 2014 had the smallest number of Republican Latina House primary candidates of all six years, with just two throwing their hat in the ring (Figure 2). Republican Latinas in red states in red districts lost, whereas Democratic Latinas in blue states in blue districts won. This suggests that strong partisan

districts are not equally as advantageous for Republican Latina candidates as they are Democratic Latina candidates.

Democratic Latina House primary candidates ran in more competitive races in all four states over all four election cycles, while Republican Latinas ran and won more of their races uncontested (Figures 5, 6). Significantly more Democratic Latinas ran as challengers compared to Republican Latinas in 2018, and more Republican Latinas ran in open seat races in 2018 compared to Democratic Latinas. This suggests Republican Latinas struggle to win in competitive races, and either self-select to run in easier primary races, or are not encouraged to run in more competitive races. For Latina candidates pursuing the general election, Party chairs may be more inclined to gatekeep Latina candidates in safer races as well, as they anticipate that Latina candidates will be less successful in competitive races. Similarly, Latina candidates seem to be competing against each other in the same districts, suggesting some are friendlier to Latina candidates than others.

Republican Latina candidates are also disadvantaged by congressional district partisanship, as they run in significantly more Democratic friendly districts even when running as challengers to incumbents. This environment is more competitive for Republican Latinas, and even when successful, they face a higher risk of losing their seat to the candidates from the opposing party. Democratic Latina candidates do not face this same disadvantage, as they run in primarily safe Democratic districts where a lost seat will still remain in their party. All congressional district partisanship tests were statistically significant, which means these findings apply to all Latinas running as incumbents, challengers, and open seat House primary races in the United States from 2012 to 2018. Republican Latinas are disadvantaged in states that are safe for Latinx candidates, and the expansion of this disadvantage to states with “whiter” demographics poses additional barriers to Republican Latina candidate success.



The United States claims to have a representative democratic system, yet many minority groups, especially minority women, have yet to see the system work for them. The effect is likely to manifest in a lack of political efficacy, or belief that our system of government works. Racial groups are not monolithic in their beliefs, and conservative Latinx are not presented with candidates that can properly represent their views in Congress. In today's modern political environment characterized by strong anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx rhetoric, it is now more important than ever that the Latinx perspective is heard. Under the Trump presidency, Latinx as a demographic group are more pessimistic about their standing in America, with more Latinas believing the situation is worsening for Latinx than their male counterparts (Lopez et.al., 2019a). The majority of Latinx in the U.S. say it has become more difficult to live in the U.S. as a Latinx, with more Latinas identifying with this sentiment than Latinos (Lopez et.al., 2019a). Finally, Latinx are less optimistic about their financial prospects for the coming years, and for their children in the future, with a gender gap still persistent among Latinas (Lopez et.al., 2019a).

It is important that the underrepresentation of Latinas is known, and that we have a better understanding as to why that is the case. The Republican Party has claimed to make efforts in recruiting more diverse candidate pools, yet this has yet to be seen or fully realized. In Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas Latinas are expected to be more successful in elections due to the larger concentrations of Latinx in those states, and yet few still succeed. In other states where Latinx populations are less dense, Latinas are likely fare far worse in their electoral prospects, and as such are less likely to run for office. If Latinas are going to increase their representation in office *both* parties need to make an obvious and concerted effort to increase inclusivity in their party message, and recruit and support Latina candidates. Conservative Latinx exist in the U.S., and many are left to choose between their political beliefs and their values when voting for

Republican candidates who have adopted racist and demeaning rhetoric towards Latinx and immigrant communities. As a representative democracy, it is crucial to the fundamental nature of our political system to ensure that all voices are heard and have the equal opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the operation of our nation.

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