

**Gender and Congressional Voting On Reproductive Rights:
A Case Study of the Mexico City Policy**

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Abstract

The United States has been a leader in the international population arena for five decades, but the domestic policy debate around international population and reproductive health issues has been increasingly characterized by politicization and partisanship. The Mexico City Policy (MCP) provides a concrete example through which to study this growing divide. I undertook a content analysis of every congressional floor debate on the MCP since 1995 to understand: 1) how the gender and party affiliation of members of Congress have influenced their support for international reproductive health, and 2) the tone of discourse employed by male and female, Democratic and Republican members, when speaking and voting on the MCP. I find evidence of a growing partisan divide around these issues in both voting and speaking patterns. Among other findings of potential use to advocates, I conclude that female members engage more frequently and more positively on international family planning than do their male counterparts.

Introduction

The United States Congress yields significant power in determining resource allocation and political priorities in support of reproductive health and rights both domestically and internationally. Because of the importance of the legislative branch, it is critical for reproductive rights advocates to understand the factors that influence the voting of the U.S. Congress. One key factor that deserves attention is the gender of congressional members. While the literature strongly suggests that women in elective office tend to support “women’s issues” issues more vigorously than do men, and while some studies have been conducted on the issue at the state legislative level, little research has been undertaken to determine just how strongly the gender of members of the United States Congress influences members’ positions on reproductive health and rights issues specifically. Even less attention has been paid to the language employed by male and female legislators when voting on reproductive health matters.

This paper aims to answer the questions: Are women in the U.S. House of Representatives more likely to vote and speak on behalf of international reproductive health and rights than their male counterparts? What tone of discourse do male and female members of Congress employ when speaking and voting on these issues? Are there certain messages and frames, including ones that can be identified as “enthusiastic” or “critical” that members employ when debating international family planning issues?

This analysis focuses on the Mexico City Policy, which denies family planning funds to any foreign non-governmental organization that provides, lobbies for or counsels on abortion, even with its own resources (U.S. Department of State 1984). The Mexico City Policy is so named because of its origins at the International Conference on Population that took place in Mexico City in 1984. The U.S. delegation to that conference declared the new policy which led to the de-funding of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, a long-time recipient of U.S. support, as well as other

organizations. The policy was instituted by executive order by President Ronald Reagan in 1984, rescinded by President Bill Clinton in 1993, reinstated by President George W. Bush in 2001 and rescinded by President Barack Obama in 2009. The United States Congress has attempted many times over the years to legislate the Mexico City Policy either into or out of existence. This paper draws on the voting records and statements from floor debates of members of the U.S. House of Representatives for its analysis.

The paper begins with an overview of the role Congress has played in family planning and abortion. This is followed by a review of the literature regarding the support of women's issues by women legislators. The paper then presents the study's methodology, key findings and conclusions.

Congress' Role in Family Planning and Abortion

The first law passed by the United States Congress in regard to birth control was the 1873 *Act for the Suppression of Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use*, more commonly known as the "Comstock Act" (Lewis 2001). While the Comstock Act, which defined contraceptives as obscene and illicit and made it a federal offense to disseminate birth control through the mail or across state lines, remained on the books through the 1930s, few other Congresses took on legislative initiatives around reproductive health and rights issues during this period.

Since the 1960s, however, the U.S. Congress has increasingly involved itself in these issues, both domestically and internationally. Specifically, at the urging of President Lyndon B. Johnson and with broad bipartisan support in the nearly all-male Congress in 1967, the United States established itself as a global leader in providing funding and technical support for international family planning (Petroni 2011). At the same time, Congress approved major investments in domestic family planning programs.

Both the domestic and international family planning programs were initially couched largely in terms of how they could contribute to stemming population growth (thus improving U.S. national security and economic interests), rather than in regard to how they might improve women's health and rights.

It did not take long for concerns about abortion to dominate the discussion around family planning in U.S. policy. Indeed, soon after the momentous 1973 *Roe v Wade* decision, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) successfully amended the Foreign Assistance Act to ensure that no U.S. family planning funds would be used for abortion services. Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL) followed with a similar amendment on domestic funding, which became law in 1976. Both the Helms and Hyde restrictions still stand today, but neither prohibited foreign or domestic organizations from using *their own* funds to provide or counsel on abortion. Those restrictions would come later, in the form of the Mexico City Policy.

Do Women Legislators Support Women's Issues?

Because of the very small proportion of women in legislatures, particularly the United States Congress, little was written historically on the relationship between women legislators and their votes and legislative priorities before to the 1970s. Frankovic was

among the first to consider the voting records of female members of Congress as compared to those of male members (Frankovic 1977). Considering votes from 1961-1975, Frankovic found that women in Congress were more liberal than their male counterparts and also that they became increasingly more cohesive in their voting behavior over time, even controlling for party affiliation. She posits that women's minority status in the Congress may have brought them together around a common agenda, specifically, one that represents more than just their individual constituencies. As Frankovic notes, "the creation of a Women's Caucus and the efforts of women legislators in favor of feminist questions attest to this" idea. As more women become elected to office, and with comfortable margins, she posed, the notion of being able to pursue causes that may be distinct from the demands of their respective constituencies, such as those related to women, would become more likely.

Frankovic's study covered a period of time when women represented a scant four percent of the U.S. Congress. As the proportion of women representatives increased over the years, so too did the literature on their voting behavior and priorities. Several articles in the 1980s reaffirmed the notion that female representatives' voting patterns are "slightly but significantly more liberal and more feminist than those of their male colleagues" (Thomas 1991).

Tatalovich and Schier assessed votes on legislation pertaining to abortion in eight U.S. Congresses, from 1973 – 1988 (Tatalovich 1993). They found that the most significant predictors of votes were ideology and religion; specifically, representatives who voted more liberally and who were non-Catholics tended to be pro-choice. They also found that the gender variable, while barely significant because of the small number of women in Congress during this time period, indicated that women representatives voted more consistently pro-choice than men.

With the momentous November 1992 elections leading to the "Year of the Woman," women's representation in the U.S. Congress jumped from six to 11 percent (Thomas 1991). Opportunities for empirical research into women legislators' behavior thus became significantly more robust, which is reflected in the literature.

Thomas, for example, found that female representatives sought not only to advance women and children's issues, but that they also wanted their male colleagues to support and prioritize these issues. In other words, they "sought to integrate issues of special concern to them into the general political environment" (ibid).

Clark argues that women legislators are more likely than men to "use power inclusively to achieve individual and collective goals" (in Thomas 2005). Dodson argues that the significant research on the topic from the 1990s suggests that a greater proportion of women in public office changes the political agenda, "with women officeholders giving greater attention than their male colleagues of the same party to women's rights as defined by the contemporary women's movement."

Dodson assessed a range of issues in the 103rd Congress and found that "only on abortion rights did women cast consistently more feminist floor votes than their male colleagues" (in Thomas 2005). While female members successfully overturned the Hyde Amendment on Medicaid funding of abortion at the subcommittee level, however, Dodson notes that "it was male, not female, members who had the highest-profile roles in

the two major pro-choice victories” of the 103rd Congress, the Federal Access to Clinic Entrances Act and the removal of the ban on abortion coverage under the Federal Employees Benefits Health Program (ibid).

Looking specifically at four votes on abortion that took place during the 103rd and 104th Congresses, Clark found that while political party affiliation had the largest impact on vote, the legislators’ gender had an important secondary influence (in Thomas 2005). Even controlling for party, female members were considerably more supportive of abortion rights than were men.

Swers also analyzed the 103rd Congress and found that “gender exerts a significant and independent effect on voting on women’s issues,” even controlling for constituency factors, party, personal characteristics and ideology (Swers 1998). Like Dodson, Swers found that a member’s gender was most significant on votes pertaining to abortion and women’s health. Specifically, a female representative was eight percent more likely than a male to vote in support of women’s issues in general, but 11 percent more likely to vote in support of reproductive health and rights. Further, Republican women appeared to express strong independence from their party’s conservative position on reproductive health issues. “Knowing that a representative is a Republican woman,” Swers notes, “increases the probability of voting for reproductive” health issues by 29 percent.

In addition to roll call voting on reproductive health and rights issues, there is evidence to suggest that women frame discussions around abortion, in particular, in different ways than men. Levy, Tien and Aved (in O’Connor 2001), for example, suggest that, as their representation in Congress has increased, women have been able to shift the abortion debate from a focus on the morality of the procedure toward the health of the pregnant woman. Women legislators, they argue, are better placed to bring their own personal experiences, and those of their mothers, sisters and daughters, to political debates around women’s health issues. Using content analysis of debates around the Hyde Amendment, they find considerable differences in the language that women use from that used by men, and also that female members differed from their male counterparts in regard to their position on Hyde. Interestingly, they also find that “the participation of women in floor debates on the Hyde Amendment seems to have altered the way men talk about the issue,” shifting the debate from a focus on the unborn fetus to about how “abortion affects a woman’s mental and physical health.” The researchers conclude that “increasing the number of women in Congress will likely result in fuller representation of women’s interests.”

Scope & Methods

For this study, a set of votes taken by the United States House of Representatives during the 104th through 110th Congresses on the Mexico City Policy were assessed. The analysis began with the year 1995, as it was the first year in which Congress voted on the Mexico City Policy, and concludes in 2007, the last year in which the House voted on the Policy. (See Annex for votes and vote counts.) During this 12-year period, the percentage of women in the House of Representatives increased from 11 to 17 percent, while the percentage of female members who were Republicans averaged 31 percent.

The study is premised on the notion that votes and statements on the Mexico City Policy are representative of members' support or opposition to international reproductive health. There are several reasons for using this policy as a proxy for the broader issues of reproductive health and rights. First, votes on the Mexico City Policy have consistently been scored by relevant interest groups, such as NARAL Pro-Choice America and Concerned Women for America, as pro or anti-reproductive rights. Second, in conducting a thorough review of the arguments used on the House floor by some 131 members over the course of 12 years, it is clear that, while some have used language around free speech, the vast majority employ language specifically pertaining to family planning, reproductive health, and in many cases, abortion.

Finally, while it is not a perfect reflection of support of or opposition to international family planning, these votes are the only ones that have been taken repeatedly on the House floor that are specific to international family planning. Decisions on funding levels for international family planning, for example, are made at the level of the Appropriations Committee – and even more specifically, its State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee. While statements made by members at that level could have been reviewed, such an analysis would have been limited to only a small number of members who sit on that committee and a small sample of debates.

The House cast a total of 13 votes on the Mexico Policy eight different times between 1995 and 2007. In some cases, there were competing amendments, and thus, two sets of votes in the same day. In other cases, there was just one vote, and members of the House spoke either in support of or in opposition to an amendment.

Analyzing all of 13 votes on the Mexico City Policy during this time period enabled a comparison of votes on the same issue over the course of different political contexts (i.e., Republican and Democratic-led Congresses) and when different proportions of women were represented.

Analyses of vote counts and floor debates were conducted to determine the association between a member's gender, party affiliation and position on the Mexico City Policy. A thorough content analysis was also conducted, analyzing floor debates and statements to assess the tone and language employed by legislators, taking into account the members' position on the issue, gender, political party and stance on abortion.

Both descriptive and interpretative content analyses were employed, focusing on the actual language contained in floor statements and colloquies, as well as seeking to understand the tone and meaning behind the language employed. The "reflected attitudes," or the emotional or judgmental tone of such communications (Thomas, R.M 2008) were considered in order to code language as "positive," "negative" or "neutral." The content, language and tone of statements were assessed, comparing the differences between male and female, and Democratic and Republican members of Congress.

The language and tones used by supporters and opponents of the Mexico City Policy, as well as male and female members of Congress, were also compared and contrasted to understand how the use of floor statements and debates around reproductive health and rights issues are alike or differ, depending on gender. An attempt was made to understand whether and how certain words, themes or messages were utilized by members over time.

Floor speeches provide an opportunity for lawmakers to attempt to influence others to support or oppose a bill, or to strengthen the will of the bill's supporters. Lawmakers can use floor debates and statements to not only communicate with their colleagues, but to display their positions publicly, particularly to interest groups and constituents. Analyzing floor speeches at the roll call voting stage of the legislative process may therefore provide an important opportunity to understand congressional position taking and efforts to influence policy. Examining the specific content of floor speeches and statements can help in developing an understanding of the depth of lawmakers' knowledge, expertise and passion, including whether they bring their personal experiences – including those influenced by their gender – to the policy debate (Chiang, 1999). Finally, understanding the language and meanings behind the positions that members of Congress take on these issues can help to ascertain whether certain messages or strategies might be effective in future votes on these issues.

Studying such language over a period of 12 years allowed for the identification of trends and themes that have been woven throughout the discourse during this time period. In some cases, these themes may have been employed deliberately to increase or decrease the level of political support for reproductive health issues. In other words, members of Congress attempt to generate enthusiasm for expanding or restricting access to international reproductive health, and also contribute to criticism of either international family planning or of the Mexico City Policy that restricts such programs.

Additionally, this analysis provided another angle to assess the impact of varying strategies employed by reproductive health advocates to influence the voting behavior of members of Congress. Based on a review of many of the advocacy materials put forward by organizations supporting or opposing international reproductive health and rights alongside the congressional debates during this time period, it is evident that members of Congress do look to such resources in order to formulate and inform the arguments that they use in floor debates and interventions.¹

The data used were drawn from historical documents found in the *Congressional Record* online database found at www.thomas.gov. A database was also created of female members by each House using data from the “Women Representatives and Senators by Congress, 1917–Present,” found on a website maintained by the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. Capitol at <http://womenincongress.house.gov/historical-data/representatives-senators-by-congress.html>. Finally, members' positions on abortion were determined by referring to congressional ratings or “scorecards” produced by NARAL Pro-Choice America and National Right to Life Committee.

The analysis included members' gender, political party and votes on the bills or amendments under study. Where appropriate, the members' stance on abortion was also included to better understand whether their position on the Mexico City Policy was influenced by their position on abortion.

Parts of the content analysis included all eight dates of debate on the House floor; in other words, all 13 votes that took place on the Mexico City Policy. The more

¹ See Petroni, Suzanne. “Historical and Current Influences on United States International Family Planning Policy,” *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, Vol. 32, Iss. 1, 2011.

thorough and detailed analysis of discourse included a sample of four complete debates on the House floor by members at the time of roll call voting. The debates that took place on these dates represented different congresses with differing proportions of women, Democrats and Republicans, and the time period covered (12 years) allowed for the analysis and understanding of changes in the discourse utilized over time.

Language Coding

The language of these full debates was coded sentence by sentence to assess whether each statement or intervention had a positive, negative or neutral tone. Statements that were clearly positive, negative or neutral were coded as such, and those which could not be so clearly identified, as well as those that were strictly procedural, were coded as neutral. The majority were coded as neutral.

To ensure reliability in the categorization of interventions, every line in each of the coding nodes (or categories) was reviewed after completing a first round of coding. This secondary review was useful in guaranteeing accuracy, particularly as the coding was conducted over the course of several months. Also, in order to rule out potential bias in and obtain verification of the categorizations, a research assistant independently reviewed and coded samples of the debates, ensuring intercoder reliability.

In all, 70,234 words from the four separate dates of debate were coded. These comprised 1466 distinct references that were coded into the five categories, as follows:

- *Positive – Oppose Mexico City Policy* - 230 references – 10,016 words
- *Positive – Support Mexico City Policy* - 107 references – 3,688 words
- *Negative – Oppose Mexico City Policy* - 215 references – 11,069 words
- *Negative – Support Mexico City Policy* - 266 references – 13,258 words
- *Neutral* - 648 references – 22,722 words

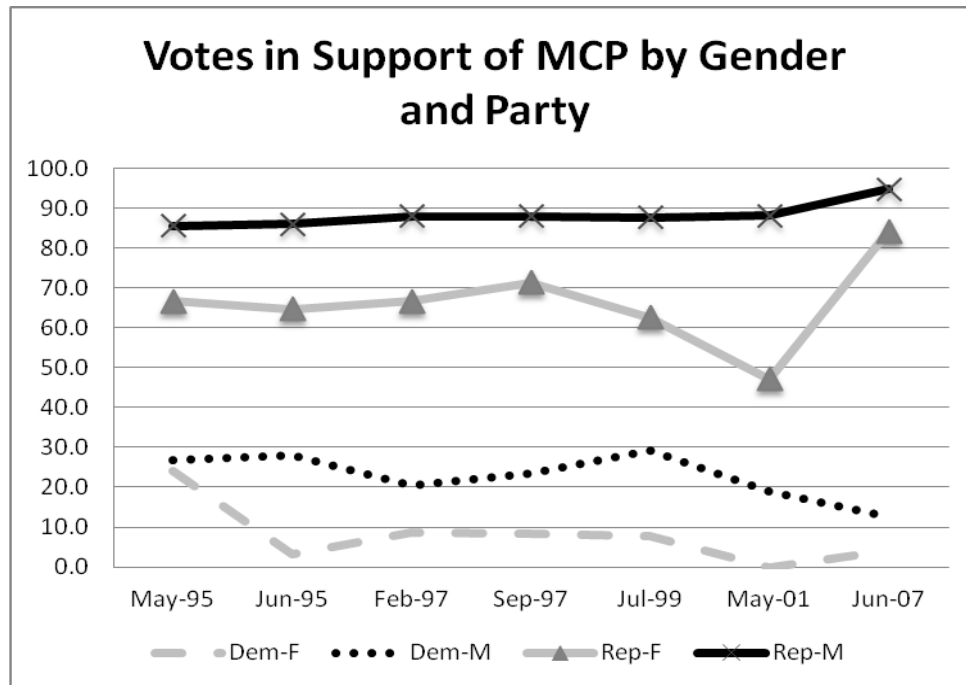
Each reference could contain anywhere from two words (if that comprised a complete sentence) to several paragraphs, if the sentences strung together were coded in the same category.

Findings

Support for the Mexico City Policy has become increasingly partisan over time, with a far lower percentage of Democrats supporting efforts to legislate the Policy into existence than Republicans. On average, 87% of Republicans and only 19% of Democrats voted in support of the Policy over the study period.

Figure 1 demonstrates that Republican members voted more frequently for the Mexico City Policy (MCP) than Democratic members. *Figure 1* also shows that regardless of party, female members voted for the Mexico City Policy at significantly lower rates than their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with the theory that women's positions on reproductive health and rights are more liberal and more feminist than their male counterparts.

FIGURE 1

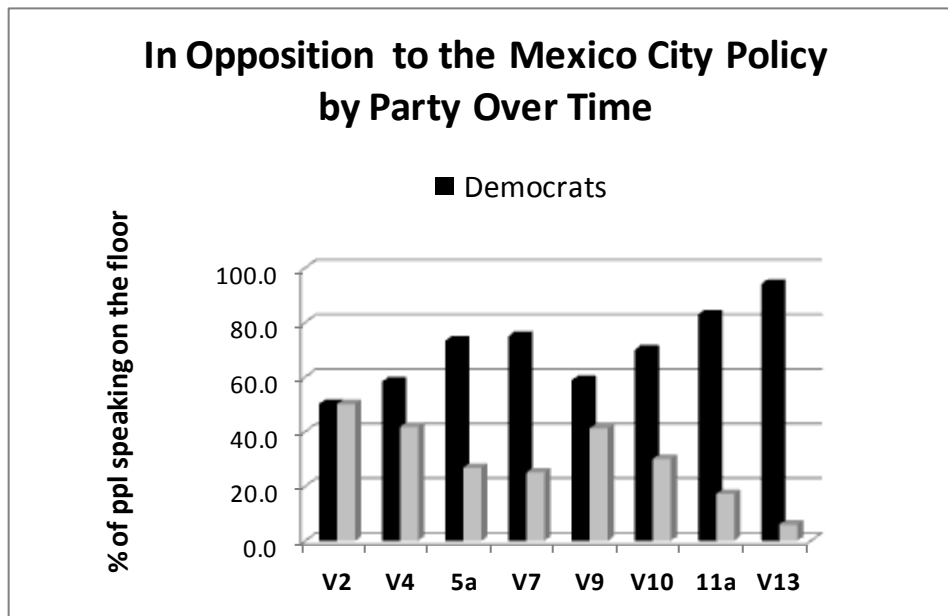


In addition to voting patterns, Republicans also represented 89.4 percent of those speaking in support of the Policy during floor debates (close to their voting percentage of 87 percent), while only 10.6 percent of Democrats came to the House floor to speak in support of the Policy, slightly less than half of their supportive vote count of 19 percent.

As shown in *Figure 2* below, while Democrats consistently comprise the majority of those speaking out in opposition to the Mexico City Policy, a significant number of Republicans have also spoken come to the House floor to express their opposition – in greater proportions than they vote against it.

For example, in Vote 4, Republicans represented 18.2 percent of those voting in opposition to the Mexico City Policy. At the same time, Republicans represented 41.7 percent of those speaking on the floor in opposition to the policy. Similarly, for Vote 9, Republicans represented 17 percent of those voting against the Mexico City Policy, but 30 percent of those speaking on the floor in opposition to the Policy.

FIGURE 2



Given that the act of speaking on the floor may represent greater intensity of sentiment or willingness to express a member’s opinion publicly than does voting, this difference perhaps indicates the strength of feeling or enthusiasm these members have around the issue.

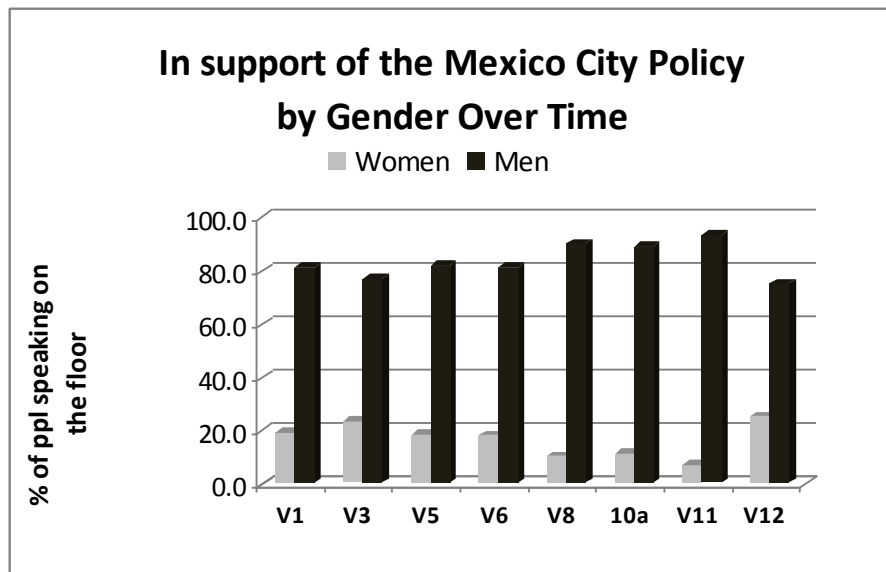
The above figures also suggest that, as with the declining support indicated in voting trends, the proportion of Republicans coming to the House floor to speak against the Policy has declined over time.

Gender and Floor Debates

It is worth noting that the author of the anti-Mexico City Policy amendment in 1995 (Morella, R-MD), as well as the one in 1997 (Meyers, R-KS), were Republican women. Female Republicans made up only 11 and 13 percent of the House in the 104th and 105th Congresses, respectively, so their sponsorship of these amendments is a powerful indication of their depth of feeling around these issues.

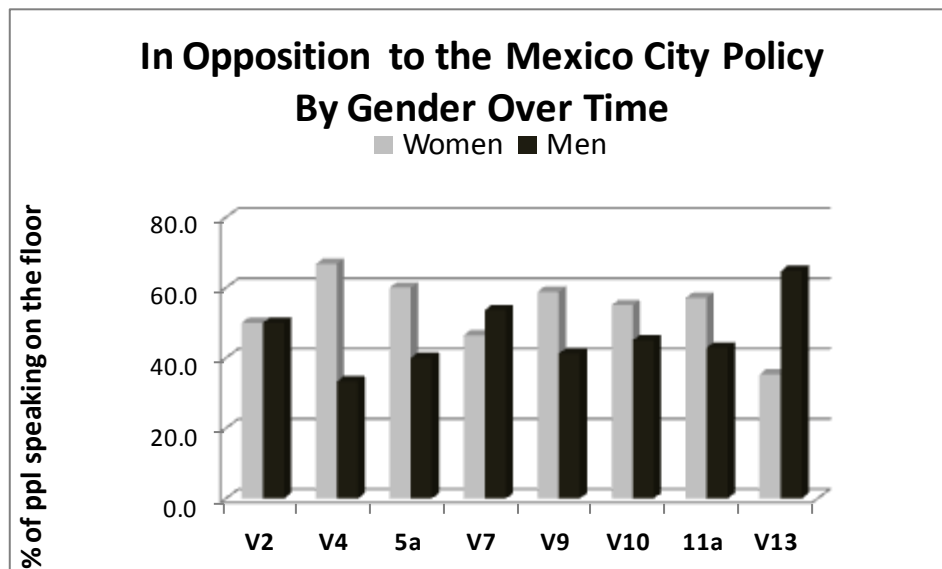
Women spoke on the House floor *in support of* the Mexico City Policy at roughly the same rates as their total representation in Congress, from seven to 25 percent (*Figure 3*). This rate differed by no greater than eight percentage points from their representation in Congress.

FIGURE 3



In Figure 4, however, we see that women represented 35 to 65 percent of representatives speaking *in opposition* to the Mexico City Policy, a rate that represents three to six times their representation in Congress.

FIGURE 4



In perhaps the starkest example, just one woman and 14 men made statements in support of the pro-Mexico City Policy amendment to the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 2002 And 2003 (May 16, 2001). In contrast, women represented 20 of the 25 members, or 80 percent, speaking *against* that same amendment.

Tone of Floor Statements

Turning now to the tone of interventions made by members on the House floor, the following are several examples of **positive** statements made by people on either side of the debate:

The Smith amendment reinstates a sound policy that was in effect under the Reagan and Bush administrations. It is a policy that reflects the views of most Americans. (Mr. Bachus, R-AL, 1995)

This statement was made in support of the Mexico City Policy and has a clear positive tone, as does this one, from an opponent of the Policy:

United States assistance is grounded in a fundamental American value, the freedom of people to choose their own future, to space and plan their families, to reduce infant mortality, and to give children a healthy start in life. That is what this is really all about. Family planning saves lives. It reduces abortions, reduces infant and childbirth-related mortality, and helps those in developing countries live healthier lives. (Mr. Sawyer, D-OH, 1997)

Below are some examples of **negatively** or critically toned statements; first by those supportive of the Mexico City Policy:

...so if you think that is a good idea and a helpful idea, there are just too many people in the world and once they get created in the womb, exterminate them, then this is a good amendment. (Mr. Hyde, R-IL, 1995)

And from those opposed:

The language we are striking restricts the use of a foreign NGOs own funds. In America, this language is unconstitutional. Around the world, it is unconscionable. (Mrs. Maloney, D-NY, 2000)

Neutral, Positive or Negative?

Of the 70,234 words and 1466 references coded during the four debates, just over 37 percent of all words were coded as neutral.

A far greater proportion of the language (40 percent) was coded as negative than as positive (22.6 percent). This was true for both interventions in support of and opposition to the Mexico City Policy, with those in support of the Policy using negative or critical language at slightly higher rates (21.8 percent) than those opposed (18.2 percent).

Supporters of the Mexico City Policy employed a positive tone in only 6.1 percent of their interventions, while opponents used positive language more than twice as much – 16.5 percent of the time.

In other words, if a member supports the Mexico City Policy, that member was highly unlikely to use positive language in his or her floor intervention, and more than

three times as likely to speak negatively or critically about the amendments on the floor, supporters of the amendment or the subject of the amendment.

Opponents of the Policy were somewhat more evenly divided in their use of either negative/critical or positive/enthusiastic language.

Themes in the Floor Debates: Abortion

In studying the language employed during the course of the 12 year time period, the word “abortion” appears as one of the most utilized words in all of the debates. This is consistent across all of the years of the study.

Supporters of the Mexico City Policy (taken here as opponents of international family planning) have often linked or conflated abortion and family planning in debates around international family planning. They also use critical and often quite graphic language around abortion in debates on these issues. These tactics came through clearly in the content analysis.

Some examples of interventions by those in favor of the Mexico City Policy who have used such negative language follow.

Mr. Chairman, this issue is about abortion. Abortion is violent. It is violence against women. It is violence against their unborn children... Abortion hurts women. It is humiliating. It is painful. It is demeaning. It is disruptive. It breaks the heart of a woman. (Mr. Pitts, R-PA, 1997)

I think we should make no mistake about it, this debate is about fat subsidies to the abortion industry. (Mr. Smith, R-NJ, 2000)

Indeed, invoking the controversial subject of abortion, and doing so with such stark terminology and messaging, is a tactic that was used repeatedly and consistently throughout the 12 years of debate.

At the same time, opponents of the Mexico City Policy have also made a connection between family planning and abortion; namely, through arguing that investing in family planning *reduces* abortions, and conversely, that restrictions on family planning programs would lead to more unsafe abortions:

The Smith amendment would end family planning services and lead to more unintended pregnancies, more unsafe abortions, tragically, and more infant and childbirth-related mortalities. (Mr. Sawyer, D-OH, 1997)

The language that we move to strike promotes abortion in the name of limiting abortion. That is the twisted logic. (Mr. Greenwood, D-NY, 2000)

References to Women in Floor Debates

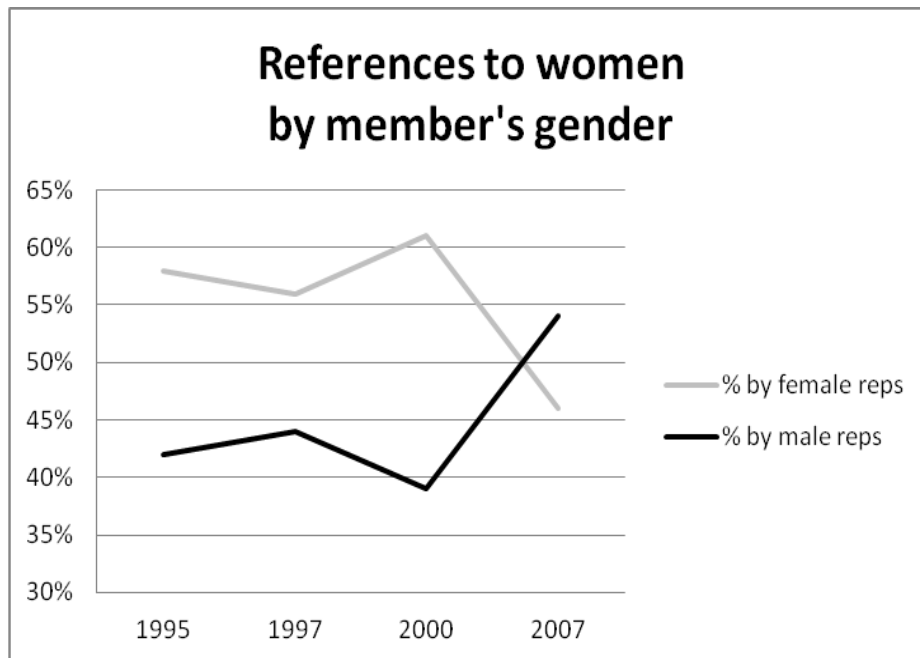
In the debates studied, members of Congress regularly and often invoked women’s health and rights. In 1995, there were 51 references to women. This number rose to 79 in 1997, to 105 in the year 2000 and then decreased to 78 in 2007. In the scope

of the full debates, “women” was either the 19th or 20th most used word, except in 2000, when it jumped in usage to number seven.

Mentions of women are made overwhelmingly by those opposed to the Mexico City Policy. While many men have spoken about women in the developing world as part of these debates, women members have spoken most frequently about women in other nations. As Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY) remarked in the 1997 debate, “*somebody has to speak for the millions of women around this world...*”

References to women are made most frequently by female members of Congress.

FIGURE 5



Discussion of women in the debates appeared in the context of women dying in pregnancy and suffering from unsafe abortions, as in this quote from Democrat Carolyn Maloney:

During the time that we have been debating this bill, 65 women around the world will die from pregnancy. (Mrs. Maloney, D-NY, 2007)

...and this from Republican Jim Greenwood:

Women have sought abortions legally and illegally all over this world for as long as we can remember. They do so under the most desperate circumstances. ...when they did a survey of their hospitals in Bolivia, they found that 50 percent of the beds were occupied by women suffering from botched illegal abortions. (Mr. Greenwood, R-PA, 2000)

Opponents of the Mexico City Policy also speak of women's value and their rights to family planning information and to space and time their pregnancies, as well to the relationship between family planning and women and children's lives.

Family planning saves lives. It frees women from the risk of disease and then death from pregnancies when their bodies just cannot take one more pregnancy. It frees children from the dire consequences of losing that parent. (Mrs. Kennelly, D-CT, 1997)

It seems to me as long as we prevent women from being able to space and number their children through voluntary family planning, which is what the Smith amendment will do, we are undervaluing them in a way that is cruel and wrong. (Mr. Porter, R-IL, 1997)

Women are also discussed in reference to their choices:

Mr. Chairman, this debate is not about abortion, it is about women. It is about whether women, poor women in the developing world, will be allowed to use their minds and choose their future. (Mr. Porter, R-IL, 1997)

...and their control of their own reproductive lives:

We are trying to give women the power to control their reproductive capabilities responsibly. (Mrs. Johnson, D-TX, 2000)

Positive references to women also referred to the need to value women, and to "help" women and children around the world:

It seems to me it is time that we value women across the world. They should be valued for their minds and their potential to add to the global community. (Mr. Porter, R-IL, 1997)

We should help women in developing countries have the smaller families that they want. (Mr. Kirk, R-IL, 2007)

Finally, there have been interventions made – often, but not always by females – that remind the members of Congress of their position vis-à-vis women in the United States and around the world.

The truth of the matter is we will never hear a word here about the woman herself, because mothers do not matter. The children that she leaves motherless at home, they do not matter. The fact that there are unsanitary conditions in which they live do not matter. (Mrs. Slaughter, D-NY, 2000)

I think the impact of the Smith language, intended or not, will be to stop tens of thousands of women from getting the kind of prenatal care that I am grateful that my wife was just able to have in having a healthy, happy baby. (Mr. Edwards, D-TX, 1997)

Those supportive of the Mexico City Policy who reference women – and they do so far less frequently than opponents – speak of women in quite different manners and tones than do opponents of the policy. They have spoken, for example, of the position of women in the United States who are opposed to abortion:

If Mrs. Maloney's charge was accurate, then the majority of the women in America are anti-woman. The LA Times poll that I mentioned earlier, found that 61 percent of all the women in America believe abortion to be murder, 61 percent of the women in America are not anti-woman. (Mr. Smith, R-NJ, 2000)

They speak of threats and campaigns against women, such as in regard to the “incarceration,” “exploitation” and the “tracking down” of pregnant women in China. And they refer to the morality of abortion and the impacts they believe this procedure has on women:

...millions of women every year are shamelessly violated and their children are poisoned and dismembered. (Mr. Smith, R-NJ, 1995)

The U.S. should not be in the business of exporting abortion overseas. It has been a tragedy for women here in the U.S., and it will carry the same hurt, it will carry the same trauma if it is used abroad. (Ms. Fallin, R-OK, 2007)

References to Population in Floor Debates

The examples above highlight some ways in which critical and enthusiastic language can be employed to generate support or opposition to a policy. Of further relevance to this study is the decreasing trend in the frequency of utilization of the word “population” in these debates. Population appears fairly frequently in the 1995 debate (94 times), a bit less so in 1997 (83 times), and it does not place in the top 50 for the years 2000 and 2007. In fact, in 2000, it is mentioned only 11 times and in 2007 12 times.

Nearly all of the references to population were made by opponents of the Mexico City Policy (i.e., supporters of international family planning), who invoked population growth as a way of generating support for international family planning, as in the following quotes:

Stabilizing population growth is vital to U.S. national interests. Rapid population expansion is a major source of political instability in developing countries as well as a drain on the global environment. (Mrs. Pelosi, D-CA, 1995)

The people who are discussing this issue today recognize the serious, severe potential calamity if we do not reduce the number of people, the huge burgeoning population growth, especially in underdeveloped countries. (Mr. Gilchrest, R-MD, 1995)

Not only have the number of references to population decreased in the years since

the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, but so too has the tone of commentary on the population issue adapted to reflect less of a focus on national security, and one more focused on the individual, as in this statement by then-Representative Mark Kirk (R-IL):

We should also adopt policies which reduce the population pressure on our own borders with a policy that supports the rights of women and lowers the pressure on our environment. (Mr. Kirk, 2007)

Looking specifically at the issues of abortion, women and population, one can see an association between the arguments and messages made by interest groups – both those supportive of and opposed to international family planning - and the tone and language employed by members of Congress on these issues over time (see, for example, Petroni, 2011).

Conclusion

This study sought to contribute to the limited evidence base on women's voting patterns at the federal level, as well as to the inadequate body of research around how language is used by members of Congress when voting on reproductive health and rights issues. It aimed to assess whether female members of the U.S. House of Representatives are more likely to vote and speak on behalf of international reproductive health and rights than their male counterparts. Further, it attempted to understand whether members of Congress contribute – intentionally or not – to waves of enthusiasm or criticism around these issues, through a thorough analysis of the tone of discourse that members of Congress employ when speaking and voting on these issues.

The analysis of votes and debates by the House of Representatives on the Mexico City Policy between 1995 and 2007 provides ample evidence to indicate that female members oppose the Policy in greater proportions than their male counterparts, both in terms of their voting patterns and their willingness to speak on the floor of the House.

Further, there is evidence to suggest that women representatives do mention in their discourse the interests of women around the world more frequently and more positively than their male counterparts. Supporters of international family planning, in particular, speak to the health, rights and empowerment of women around the world, and the responsibility of the United States to support these women. Opponents tend to speak about women in far less feminist ways.

As Frankovic (1977) found some 35 years ago, women's minority status in Congress may act to bring these women together around a common agenda. This study suggests that the political leadership shown by women in the sponsorship of legislation, the frequency and tone of floor statements, and the raw vote counts in relation to the Mexico City Policy are indications that one of these common agenda items is, indeed, international family planning.

This study also found that, in general, the tone of debates on these issues has been quite negative over time, with those supportive of the Mexico City Policy (or opposed to international family planning) using critical language at greater levels than do supporters

of international family planning. The use of such critical language, and of powerful, negative images, may suggest that policymakers – with the support of interest groups – are attempting to appeal to their passionate supporters, as well as to the emotions of those otherwise apathetic to the cause, in order to diminish support for international family planning.

When viewed in the context of previous studies (i.e., Petroni 2011), one can see that many of the messages and themes employed by members of Congress comport with those put forward by interest groups on either side of the international family planning issue. This is most acutely evidenced in the diminishing attention to issues of population growth and an increasing focus on women’s health and rights in the years since the International Conference on Population and Development. This would suggest some coherence between the advocacy efforts of these groups and their impacts on policymakers discourse and, perhaps, their votes.

Finally, this research has provided further evidence to suggest that the increasing partisanship and passion around social issues that has been seen in general in Washington in the 1990s and 2000s is exemplified in debates around the Mexico City Policy, and by proxy, around international reproductive health and rights.

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Annex – Votes on Mexico City Policy

May 24, 1995 – 104th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 350
 On Agreeing to the Smith (R) Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	52	145	197	26.4	6
<i>FEMALE</i>	8	25	33	24.2	0
<i>MALE</i>	44	120	164	26.8	6
REPUBLICAN	188	35	223	84.3	7
<i>FEMALE</i>	10	5	15	66.7	2
<i>MALE</i>	178	30	208	85.6	5
INDEPENDENT	0	1	1	0.0	0
TOTALS	240	181	421	57.0	13

24% of female Democrats voted in support of MCP (for Smith), just two percentage points less than male Democrats
 67% of female Republicans voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 19% less than male Republicans

May 24, 1995 – 104th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 349
 On Agreeing to the Morella (R) Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	157	43	200	78.5	3
<i>FEMALE</i>	29	2	31	93.5	1
<i>MALE</i>	128	41	169	75.7	2
REPUBLICAN	40	184	224	17.9	6
<i>FEMALE</i>	7	8	15	46.7	2
<i>MALE</i>	33	176	209	15.8	4
INDEPENDENT	1	0	1	100.0	0
TOTALS	198	227	425	46.6	9

93% of female Democrats voted against MCP (for Morella), 18 percentage points more than male Democrats
 47% of female Republicans voted against MCP (for Morella), 30 percentage points more than male Republicans

June 28, 1995 – 104th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 433
 On Agreeing to the Smith Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	48	150	198	24.2	4
<i>FEMALE</i>	1	29	30	3.3	2
<i>MALE</i>	47	121	168	28.0	2
REPUBLICAN	195	36	231	84.4	0
<i>FEMALE</i>	11	6	17	64.7	0
<i>MALE</i>	184	30	214	86.0	0
INDEPENDENT	0	1	1	0.0	0
TOTALS	243	187	430	56.5	4

3% of female Democrats voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 25 percentage points less than male Democrats
 65% of female Republicans voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 21 percentage points lower than male Republicans

June 28, 1995 – 104th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 432
 On Agreeing to the Meyers Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	158	40	198	79.8	4
<i>FEMALE</i>	30	0	30	100.0	2
<i>MALE</i>	128	40	168	76.2	2
REPUBLICAN	42	189	231	18.2	0
<i>FEMALE</i>	9	8	17	52.9	0
<i>MALE</i>	33	181	214	15.4	0
INDEPENDENT	1	0	1	100.0	0
TOTALS	201	229	430	46.7	4

100% of female Democrats voted against MCP (for Meyers), 24 percentage points more than male Democrats
 52% of female Republicans voted against MCP (for Meyers), 36 percentage points higher than male Republicans

February 13, 1997 – 105th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 23
 On Agreeing to the Smith Amendment - H.R.581

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	37	163	200	18.5	5
<i>FEMALE</i>	3	32	35	8.6	4
<i>MALE</i>	34	131	165	20.6	1
REPUBLICAN	194	30	224	86.6	2
<i>FEMALE</i>	10	5	15	66.7	1
<i>MALE</i>	184	25	209	88.0	1
INDEPENDENT	0	1	1	0.0	0
TOTALS	231	194	425	54.4	7

9% of female Democrats voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 12 percentage points less than male Democrats
 67% of female Republicans voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 21 percentage points less than male Republicans

September 04, 1997 – 105th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 363
 On Agreeing to the Smith (R) Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	42	161	203	20.7	3
<i>FEMALE</i>	3	33	36	8.3	3
<i>MALE</i>	39	128	167	23.4	0
REPUBLICAN	192	29	221	86.9	5
<i>FEMALE</i>	10	4	14	71.4	2
<i>MALE</i>	182	25	207	87.9	3
INDEPENDENT	0	1	1	0.0	0
TOTALS	234	191	425	55.1	8

8% of female Democrats voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 15 percentage points less than male Democrats
 71% of female Republicans voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 16 percentage points less than male Republicans

September 04, 1997 – 105th Congress
FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 362
 On Agreeing to the Gilman (D) Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	171	33	204	83.8	2
<i>FEMALE</i>	34	3	37	91.9	2
<i>MALE</i>	137	30	167	82.0	0
REPUBLICAN	38	185	223	17.0	3
<i>FEMALE</i>	6	8	14	42.9	2
<i>MALE</i>	32	177	209	15.3	1
INDEPENDENT	1	0	1	100.0	0
TOTALS	210	218	428	49.1	5

92% of female Democrats voted against MCP (for Gilman), 10 percentage points more than male Democrats
 43% of female Republicans voted against MCP (for Gilman), 28 percentage points more than male Republicans

July 29, 1999 – 106th Congress
FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 349
 On Agreeing to the Smith Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	39	168	207	18.8	4
<i>FEMALE</i>	3	35	38	7.9	4
<i>MALE</i>	36	133	169	21.3	0
REPUBLICAN	189	31	220	85.9	2
<i>FEMALE</i>	10	6	16	62.5	1
<i>MALE</i>	179	25	204	87.7	1
INDEPENDENT	0	1	1	0.0	0
TOTALS	228	200	428	53.3	6

8% of female Democrats voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 14 percentage points less than male Democrats
 63% of female Republicans voted in support of MCP (for Smith), 25 percentage points less than male Republicans

July 29, 1999 – 106th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 350
 On Agreeing to the Greenwood-Lowey Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTIN G</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTIN G</u>
DEMOCRATIC	174	35	209	83.3	2
<i>FEMALE</i>	39	1	40	97.5	0
<i>MALE</i>	135	34	169	79.9	2
REPUBLICAN	46	173	219	21.0	2
<i>FEMALE</i>	9	7	16	56.3	1
<i>MALE</i>	37	166	203	18.2	1
INDEPENDENT	1		1	100.0	0
TOTALS	221	208	429	51.5	4

98% of female Democrats voted against MCP (for Greenwood-Lowey), 18 percentage points more than male Democrats
 56% of female Republicans voted against MCP (for Greenwood-Lowey), 38 percentage points more than male Republicans

July 13, 2000 – 106th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 396
 On Agreeing to the Greenwood Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	170	35	205	82.9	6
<i>FEMALE</i>	38	1	39	97.4	2
<i>MALE</i>	132	34	166	79.5	4
REPUBLICAN	35	185	220	15.9	2
<i>FEMALE</i>	7	9	16	43.8	1
<i>MALE</i>	28	176	204	13.7	1
INDEPENDENT	1	1	2	50.0	0
TOTALS	206	221	427	48.2	8

97% of female Democrats voted against MCP (for Gilman), 18 percentage points more than male Democrats
 44% of female Republicans voted against MCP (for Gilman), 30 percentage points more than male Republicans

May 16, 2001 – 107th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 115
 On Agreeing to the Hyde-Barcia-Smith-Oberstar Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	32	176	208	15.4	2
<i>FEMALE</i>	0	40	40	0.0	2
<i>MALE</i>	32	136	168	19.0	0
REPUBLICAN	185	33	218	84.9	2
<i>FEMALE</i>	8	9	17	47.1	1
<i>MALE</i>	177	24	201	88.1	1
INDEPENDENT	1	1	2	50.0	0
TOTALS	218	210	428	50.9	4

0 female Democrats voted in support of MCP (for Hyde), 19 percentage points less than male Democrats
 47% of female Republicans voted in support of MCP (for Hyde), 39 percentage points less than male Republicans

June 21, 2007 – 110th Congress
 FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 534
 On Agreeing to the Smith Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	25	206	231	10.8	4
<i>FEMALE</i>	2	46	48	4.2	4
<i>MALE</i>	23	160	183	12.6	0
REPUBLICAN	180	12	192	93.8	10
<i>FEMALE</i>	16	3	19	84.2	1
<i>MALE</i>	164	9	173	94.8	9
INDEPENDENT	0	0	0		0
TOTALS	205	218	423	48.5	14

4.2% of female Democrats voted in support of MCP (for Wolf-Smith), 8 percentage points less than male Democrats
 84% of female Republicans voted in support of MCP (for Wolf-Smith), 9 percentage points less than male Republicans

June 21, 2007 – 110th Congress
FINAL VOTE RESULTS FOR ROLL CALL 533
 On Agreeing to the Lowey Amendment

	<u>AYES</u>	<u>NOES</u>	<u>TOTAL VOTING</u>	<u>% VOTE AYE</u>	<u>NOT VOTING</u>
DEMOCRATIC	207	24	231	89.6	5
<i>FEMALE</i>	47	2	49	95.9	2
<i>MALE</i>	160	22	182	87.9	3
REPUBLICAN	16	177	193	8.3	9
<i>FEMALE</i>	4	15	19	21.1	1
<i>MALE</i>	12	162	174	6.9	8
INDEPENDENT	0	0	0		0
TOTALS	223	201	424	52.6	14

96% of female Democrats voted against MCP (for Greenwood-Lowey), 8 percentage points more than male Democrats
 21% of female Republicans voted against MCP (for Greenwood-Lowey), 15 percentage points more than male Republicans