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Do Female US House of Representatives Candidates Receive More Scrutiny and Consideration of Their Families and Family Lives Than Do Male US House of Representatives Candidates?

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The issue of women's underrepresentation in politics is highly relevant in today's political climate. The purpose of my research is to determine whether female candidates face more scrutiny and consideration of their families and family lives than do male candidates during a campaign.

To test my hypothesis that female candidates receive more scrutiny for their family and family lives than male candidates do, I collected a sample of 45 male v. female US House of Representatives races (without an incumbent running) from the 2018, 2016, and 2014 elections. Then, I read 600+ local newspaper articles and coded for positive, neutral, and negative mentions of the candidate's family. I also examined the data across party lines and regions of the US to see if where a candidate runs or what party they belong to yields different results than the overall trends in the US show.

My results show that overall, most mentions of a candidate's family are neutral. There are 7.8% more positive mentions overall for a male candidate's family than a female candidate's family. In 2014 and 2016, female candidates' families had about 2.7% more negative mentions than males did. However, in 2018, the families of male candidates had 7.9% more negative mentions than did families of female candidates. This data shows that over time, the mentions of family for males have gotten more negative and the negativity surrounding female families has decreased. From my research, it seems that women only perceive that their families receive more scrutiny than their male counterparts, with the exception of female Republican candidates and female candidates in the Western region of the US. It will be interesting to see if these trends continue in the upcoming 2020 elections.

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