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The Role of Gender in Scholastic Congressional Debate

In efforts to understand why the United States Congress remains male-dominated, researchers have analyzed different factors behind the low female candidacy rate, finding a lack of early exposure to politics and competition to be a key contributor. High School Congressional Debate embraces political competition, making it an attractive vehicle for encouraging young women to pursue politics. However, reports of gender inequity abound, likely discouraging female participation. I collect and analyze data from debate tournaments across the country in the past four years to study the role of gender in Congressional Debate. I ask (1) if Congress rounds are male-dominated, (2) if women are less likely than men to advance to elimination and final rounds, and (3) how round composition and advancement have changed in the time period studied. I first find that, on average, all Congress rounds consist of primarily male debaters, a majority that grows stronger as tournaments progress from the preliminary round through the final round. This decline in the proportion of the round who are female is due to my second finding that female debaters are less likely to advance to elimination and final rounds than their male counterparts. Lastly, I conclude that female Congressional Debaters have experienced no significant change in round composition or advancement disparities over the past four years, with the exception of a marginal increase in the percentage of elimination round participants who are female. For Scholastic Speech and Debate to more effectively empower future leaders to correct societal inequities, the National Speech and Debate Association, coaches, judges, and students must all reconsider and reform how gender equity is collectively approached within the community.

Keywords: gender bias, high school debate, congressional debate, scholastic competition, speech, debate, congress, American politics

Women in the United States Congress

Today, a record number of 144 United States congressional seats are held by women. Despite the improvements that have brought the country to this point, a 50% increase over the past decade alone, those women currently serving on Capitol Hill compose only 27% of Congress (Blazina and Desilver, 2021). For decades, political scientists have studied whether the significant and persistent gender gap in the United States congress is due to voter sexism. Much of existing scholarship suggests that female candidates are not penalized by their gender (Dolan, 2014; Lawless and Pearson, 2008; Sanbonmatsu, 2010), prompting researchers and journalists alike to conclude that "when women run, they win." However, data published earlier this year calls into question the previous literature that has dominated scholarly discussion of gender in politics. Pike and Galinsky find that men are 25% more likely than women to win open-seat races while male challengers are three times as likely as female challengers to win races against incumbents (Pike and Galinsky, 2021).

Regardless of possible gender biases in elections, researchers largely agree that a key contributor to the gender gap in Congress is the lack of female candidacy in elections. Women are less likely to run for congressional offices in the first place. From 1980 to 2012, a mere 13% of candidates were female in both primary and general congressional elections, and 70% of all congressional elections included no female candidates (Shames, 2015). A seminal study of more than 2,000 college students found five reasons for this participation disparity, two of which are pertinent to this study as they concern the early growth and development of prospective candidates. Lawless and Fox find that "young women tend to be exposed to less political information and discussion than do young men" and "young men are more likely than young women to have played organized sports and care about winning" (Lawless and Fox, 2013). I conduct this study to examine potential parallels to Congressional Debate in both participation and winning rates, but also because participation in activities like debate, which expose young women to politics and competition, empirically affect whether women decide to run for Congress as adults. Closing the gap starts early.

Student Congressional Debate

A three-hour Student Congress session simulates a United States Congress session with a quorum of roughly fifteen students, "senators" or "representatives," taking the floor to argue, in a three-minute speech and one to two-minutes of cross examination, in favor or against a piece of legislation. Students are tasked with researching and presenting different arguments supported with quality evidence, refuting arguments made by opposing legislators, synthesizing the merits and impacts of the arguments presented by their peers in the round, and mastering parliamentary procedure all with persuasive rhetoric. After witnessing and taking detailed notes of a session, up to 4 judges must rank all of the competitors according to how they performed during the round with first place occupied by the best legislator. Judges, volunteers and hired, include Speech and Debate coaches, alumni, and competitors' parents. The distinction between types of judges is important as their experience and age leads to

varying levels of implicit gender bias (McCauley, 2018). After tabulation, the competitors whose average rank across judges falls above the threshold cut off for advancement, typically ranging from the third to the sixth debater, continue to the next round.

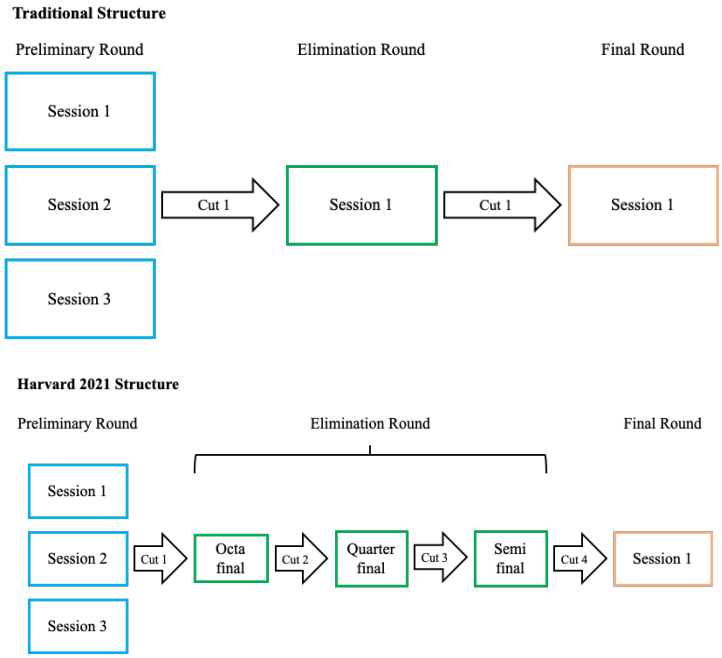

Figure 1. | Congress tournament schematic. National tournaments vary in structure. All include two stages of advancement. Elimination round will be used to encompass all intermediate sessions. At each round of cuts, roughly one third of participants in the round advance to the next round.

Most tournaments have (1) a preliminary round, three sessions in which all competitors entered in the tournament compete, (2) an elimination semifinal round, one or two sessions in which those who make the cut following preliminary rounds compete, and (3) a final round, one or two sessions in which debaters who made the cut following the elimination round compete to win the tournament. While this three-round, roughly five-session, format shown in Figure 1, is customary, tournaments with a higher number of entries include more elimination rounds. The Harvard debate tournament this year was the first tournament ever to include an octa final round as a part of their elimination rounds for Congress. This octa final put Harvard at two rounds over the traditional model. For larger tournaments like Harvard and Yale, all sessions between the preliminary round and final round will be consolidated into the "elimination round" for purposes of analysis.

Women in Public Forum Debate

Two years ago, in efforts to support the widely accepted theory that women are inherently less likely to win debate rounds, Rich Kawolics, the Director of Speech and Debate at the Laurel School in Ohio, began researching gender disparities in various forms of Speech and Debate, primarily Public Forum, a classic two vs two debate event that differs in format from Congressional Debate. He and his team find that, in 2018, only 32.6% of Public Forum competitors were female-identified, a percentage which dropped to 26.3% in elimination rounds. The result of this disparity between 2009 and 2018 is an average of 16 female debaters per year being eliminated statistically early, losing a preliminary round they were projected to win (Kawolics, 2019). Inspired by Kawolics's work, I conduct this study to uncover to what extent similar trends of gender inequity persist in my own event, Congress.

The Unique Challenge for Female Congressional Debaters

Congress combines elements of both speech and debate events as it calls for the strong argumentation of a debate round as well as the art of compelling speech delivery. As such, Congress incorporates the challenges faced by female-presenting students in speech and debate events. In his study of judges' post-round feedback to Public Forum competitors, Kawolics finds that though Debate mandates argument and persuasion, female-presenting debaters suffer disproportionately from comments accusing a debater of excessive assertiveness:

> "female-identified debaters are criticized for being too assertive or aggressive about twice as frequently as male-identified debaters. Moreover, while male-identified debaters criticized for aggressiveness still have a 50% probability of winning the round, female-identified debaters receiving the same criticism lose three-fourths of the rounds in which the criticism is levied. And when the criticism is given in a round in which the female-identified debaters are facing male-identified debaters, the loss rate is closer to 90%" (Kawolics, 2019).

Meanwhile, just the pitch difference between the female and male voice hurts female competitors (McCauley, 2018) as research finds lower voices to be perceived as "more competent, stronger and more trustworthy" (Klofstad, 2012). As the pitch of the female voice is typically twice as high as its male counterpart, women in Speech events, who are not usually presenting arguments as in debate, encounter the pitch challenge most frequently. Judged on their speaking and debating, female competitors in Congress find themselves in the unique position to experience the gender biases that come with both Speech and Debate.

In addition to the gender discrimination of other speech and debate events, women in Congress also suffer from the gender biases of their peers. Student Congress is the only Speech and Debate event in which students are not guaranteed a set amount of speaking time. Speaking order in the session and how often students give speeches and ask questions in cross examination depends on recognition of the debaters by the "presiding officer" (PO). POs are competitors who have been elected by the other students in the chamber to lead the round via parliamentary procedure, keeping track of time, executing the agenda set just prior to the debate and the roll call voting that succeeds a debate, and, importantly, selecting speakers. For the first piece of legislation, of two or three that are debated in a single session, the PO is tasked with selecting speakers. If 5 students stand and raise their placard to be recognized for a speech or question, the PO decides which competitor will give that speech or question. What debaters have anecdotally reported for years is that POs, especially male POs, will either intentionally or subconsciously neglect to call on women and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021). The result of the systemic "dropping" of female and Black debaters is that they consistently speak later in the debate on each piece of legislation. This is because, while the PO sets the initial order of speakers and questioners for the round, they are obligated to follow a system of "precedence and recency," which depends on the initial order, for the rest of the round. The system dictates that, of the competitors standing to be recognized, the speech or question must go to the competitor who has spoken (a) the fewest number of times, and (b) least recently. So, when a debater is selected last or close to last by the PO on the first piece of legislation of the session, everyone who spoke before them has priority to speak earlier on the next pieces of legislation meaning they are generally bound to speaking late on the rest of the bills. Two problems emerge: First, students selected later must adapt around the arguments everyone before them has given, making it more likely they sound redundant either in their impacts or rebuttals. Second, if the chamber is in the middle of debate on the last piece of legislation when the session is set to end, the competitors forced to the bottom of the speaking priority do not get the chance to speak on the last piece of legislation. Although judges are supposed to judge on the quality rather than the quantity of speeches given by each competitor, speaking a lower number of times puts competitors at a disadvantage for the majority of judges who are influenced, consciously or not, by the number of speeches given (B. Stanchik, personal communication, 2021). Thus, women, who are more likely to be pushed to the bottom of the speaking order by the PO, often speak less in a session than the men. Congress includes student-led discrimination as a unique challenge while also consolidating the presumed and proven gender injustices of other speech and debate events and the larger society in which we live, making it worthy of separate study.

Studying the Role of Gender in Student Congress

I most broadly ask if gender affects outcomes for congressional debaters. I am interested in two distinct areas: round advancement and round composition. Regarding the former, I ask if women are less likely to advance to the next round.

1. Do fewer women than men advance from the preliminary round to elimination rounds as a percentage of respectively female or male debaters entered in the tournament?
2. Do fewer women than men advance from the preliminary round to the final round as a percentage of respectively female or male debaters entered in the tournament?

Regarding round composition, I ask if rounds are dominated by male-presenting debaters.

3. What percentage of debaters entered in the tournament are female?
4. What percentage of debaters competing in elimination rounds are female?
5. What percentage of debaters competing in final rounds are female?
6. Does the percentage of debaters in the round that are female decrease as the tournament progresses from the preliminary round to the final round?

Over the past few years I have witnessed marginal growth in the event which may to suggest the event to be improving in the opportunities it affords women to succeed. Because determining the existence of such a trend is important in informing how the Congressional Debate community responds to gender inequity, the final question I pose assesses how Congress has evolved in recent years.

7. How have measures of round advancement and composition changed over the past four years?

I propose the following hypotheses:

Round Advancement

H1 Fewer female debaters advance to the elimination round as a percentage of female entries than do male debaters as a percentage of male entries.

H2 Fewer female debaters advance from the preliminary round to the final round as a percentage of female entries than do male debaters as a percentage of male entries.

H3 Time is positively correlated with the percentage of female entries who advance to the preliminary and final round: the percentage of women, as a percentage of female entries, who advance to the elimination round has increased over the past four years as has the percentage of women, as a percentage of female entries, who advance to the final round.

Round Composition

H4 The percentages of the preliminary round, elimination round, and final round who are male are higher than the percentage of the teen population who are male.

H5 There is an inverse relationship between round progression and the percentage of the round who are female: the preliminary round has the highest percentage of female competitors, the final round has the lowest percentage of female debaters, and the elimination round has a percentage of female debaters intermediate to those of the preliminary and final rounds.

H6 Time is positively correlated with the percentage of the round that is female: the percentage of the preliminary, elimination, and final round who are female has increased over the past four years.

I analyze 40 tournaments that occurred during the past four years, finding that female-presenting debaters are less likely to advance to the elimination and final round than male debaters. On average, all three rounds are dominated by male-presenting debaters, a majority that grows as the tournament progresses from the preliminary round through the final round. The only change over time I find is a slight increase in the percentage of participants in the elimination rounds who are female.

Measuring the Impact of Gender

Data Collection

Because no mass dataset exists with the records of every Speech and Debate tournament, I built my own within accessibility restraints. Tabroom is a website which many tournaments use to publish information pertinent to their competitors such as who has advanced to the next round and where rounds are held. This centralized website with tournament records is useful for researchers looking to analyze trends across multiple tournaments and years. Inconveniently, however, not all tournaments choose to publish their records and, even among those that do, there is great variation in publishing format ranging from an easily copied csv file to a pdf scan of handwritten results. Digital debate record keeping is also somewhat of a recent phenomenon, such that published records prior to 2016 are scarce. Despite access barriers, I gather data from ten national tournaments across four years, 2016/2017 to 2020/2021. The dataset they compose spans a total of thirty-nine tournaments, 128 rounds, and nearly 7,000 entries.

For each tournament, I first enter the list of all students entered in the tournament and second, the list of students who advanced to each elimination round and the final round. At this stage tournaments with more than a semifinal round are consolidated to fit the three-round model with all elimination rounds (semi, quarter, and octa final rounds) forming what will labeled the “elimination round.” With the names of the competitors in each round entered, I assign each entry a “0” or “1” based on presumed gender. As the gender of students is not publicly available on Speech and Debate platforms, I resort to manual methodology: I look up each student online, using pronouns and profile pictures found on social media accounts and school websites to inform an assumed gender of each student. In the absence of a social media or school website presence, the assumption is premised on name alone. Because gender assignment in this study is not entirely reliable, female-identified and male-identified will be used to refer to students assumed to be female or male respectively depending on their online presence.

Data Analysis

I define ten statistics for each tournament for each year.

1. The percentage of entries who were female-identified
2. The percentage of entries who were male-identified
3. The percentage of female-identified debaters who advanced to the elimination round

4. The percentage of male-identified debaters who advanced to the elimination round
5. The percentage of elimination rounds who were female-identified
6. The percentage of elimination rounds who were male-identified
7. The percentage of female-identified debaters who advanced from the preliminary round to the final round
8. The percentage of male-identified debaters who advanced from the preliminary round to the final round
9. The percentage of the final round who were female-identified
10. The percentage of the final round who were male-identified

In assessing how these statistics compare to each other and change over time, I make four assumptions which inform my selection of a two-sample t-test and bivariate regression as the appropriate statistical models for analysis.

1. Binary and non-binary assumption

I construct an initial binary in round advancement. I assume two outcomes for an individual competitor: they progress to the next round or they do not. In reality, a single Congress session has many more outcomes as sessions are ranked from best competitor to worst competitor with roughly the top third competitors advancing to the next round. For ease of trend abstraction, I take the scale of ranks into account only to the extent that it informs the consolidated two outcomes of advancement or non-advancement.

This binary would make the occurrence of an independent round a Bernoulli trial, lending itself to a binomial test in which, for one female-identified debater, advancement is success and non-advancement is failure. Seth et al. utilize this model in their analysis of whether PF rounds with female-presenting debaters are less likely to be video recorded (Seth et al., 2020). However, I draw exclusively on advancement trends within the context of initial entries which dismisses the useful but preliminary binary as well as the binomial test it would imply. That is, the question I investigate regarding round advancement is not "did a single female-identified competitor advance," but rather "how many female-identified competitors advanced as a percentage of all female-identified competitors present." As there are no longer just two outcomes but infinite, I opt for models which allow for such a sample space.

2. Sample assumption

The purpose of this assumption is simple extrapolation. I assume that the behavior exhibited by the data in my dataset, the sample under observation, is equal to the full sample. Here arises an important distinction between the local Speech and Debate circuit and the national Speech and Debate circuit. The national circuit is home to the end-of-year NSDA National Tournament as well as larger tournaments such as Harvard or Glenbrooks which draw hundreds of students from across the country every year. Each district has its own local circuit of schools in the region who each send a few participants to district tournaments every month to compete against each other. I study the national circuit because I accept national tournaments as an average of local circuits and a clearer indicator of how Congress operates as an event. By virtue of drawing competitors, judges, coaches, and directors from across the country, national tournaments aggregate regional differences as they concern gender equity, approaching the true parameter of all tournaments more efficiently than local tournaments. However, there remain important judging and competitive differences between the circuits, so I assume my sample, ten national tournaments, is equal only to the larger national circuit population. Usually researchers conduct randomized trials to make this assumption, controlling for bias. The limits on data available preclude such randomization. However, as the tournaments in my sample vary in size, location, judges, competitors, and norms I assume my sample to be representative, though not random, of the national circuit. Extrapolation about the population is therefore permissible.

3. No bias assumption

Of primary concern to this analysis is omitted variable bias, that a third variable not accounted for affects outcomes of competitors. I concede such a variable to exist: in a word, intersectionality. There are a number of factors that affect how well a competitor does in a congress round: objective performance and factors of identity such as appearance, class, race, or sexuality. I assume not that these factors do not influence round outcomes, but that they are generally incorporated across the more than 150 individual sessions and pseudo randomized sample I study. While I would ideally control for sources of bias in a multivariate regression, accessibility restraints emerge as a barrier once more. A multivariate regression would allow me to hold variables such as objective performance or race constant while observing solely the effect of gender on round outcomes. However, a database of all debaters' identity information does not exist and there is no debater index to gauge the objective ability of each debater. The no bias assumption allows me to do what a multivariate regression would have done under optimal circumstances: evaluate the role of gender on round outcomes independently of other factors.

4. Normal distribution assumption

Assumption two discusses how I assume my representative sample to be equal to a randomized sample. While this allows me to conclude it is representative of the whole, it also allows me to assume that the data are normally distributed. This assumption is true, the data for each variable follow a normal distribution, a requirement of both the

t-test and bivariate regression. Possibly the most important assumption, this assumption underlines how all ten statistics I find vary, mandating the use of non-binary models.

Two-Sample T-test

T-tests are designed to assess the impact of a binary variable on a non-binary variable. In the data collection process, only one competitor out of roughly seven thousand was identified as non-binary. Gender is not a binary, it is a spectrum. There is room for error in the data collection process which likely explains this small number of non-binary competitors. However, because only one non-binary competitor was identified, I dismiss the data point from the data. Thus, for purposes of this study alone, gender as a variable is binary with two levels: male-identified and female-identified. The two-sample t-test calculates the average difference in means between the male-identified and female-identified population on the given second variable. I employ a total of five two-sample t-tests to assess round advancement and round composition.

Round Advancement

1. Difference in means between (a) the number of female-identified competitors advancing to the elimination round as a percentage of female-identified entries and (b) the number of male-identified competitors advancing to the elimination round as a percentage of male-identified entries
2. Difference in means between (a) the number of female-identified competitors advancing to the final round from the preliminary round as a percentage of female-identified entries and (b) the number of male-identified competitors advancing to the final round from the preliminary round as a percentage of male-identified entries

Round Composition

3. Difference in means between (a) the percentage of the preliminary round who are female-identified and (b) the percentage of the preliminary round who are male-identified
4. Difference in means between (a) the percentage of the elimination round who are female-identified and (b) the percentage of the elimination round who are male-identified
5. Difference in means between (a) the percentage of the final round who are female-identified and (b) the percentage of the final round who are male-identified

Bivariate Regression

The purpose of bivariate regressions is to evaluate how two non-binary variables vary with each other, thus how the independent affects the dependent. I employ regression to assess how round advancement and composition have changed over the past four years, with time as the independent variable. I run a linear regression for the eight following statistics.

Round Advancement

1. The number of female-identified competitors advancing to the elimination round as a percentage of female-identified entries over time
2. The number of male-identified competitors advancing to the elimination round as a percentage of male-identified entries over time
3. The number of female-identified competitors advancing to the final round from the preliminary round as a percentage of female-identified entries over time
4. The number of male-identified competitors advancing to the final round from the preliminary round as a percentage of male-identified entries over time

Round Composition

5. The percentage of entries who are female-identified over time
6. The percentage of the elimination round who are female-identified over time
7. The percentage of the final round who are female-identified over time
8. The percentage of the round that is female-identified over the tournament. In this regression, the round is the independent variable while round composition is the dependent. The purpose of this test is to quantify how the proportion of female-identified students in the room shrinks as tournaments move towards the final round, becoming more competitive.

Scope of Study

Tournament	Years	Rounds	Competitors
Yale University Invitational	2017 - 2020	13	912
UPenn Liberty Bell Classic	2018 - 2021	12	359
Tournament of Champions	2017 - 2020	12	504
The Princeton Classic	2017 - 2020	12	589

National Speech and Debate Association National Tournament (Senate)	2017 - 2020	12	715
Harvard National Forensics Tournament	2019 – 2021*	13	1,450
Glenbrooks Speech and Debate Tournament	2017 - 2020	12	917
Barkley Forum for High Schools	2018 - 2021	13	632
New York City Invitational Debate and Speech Tournament	2017 - 2020	12	351
Arizona State HDSHC Invitational	2018 - 2021	12	441
Total		123	6,870

Table 1. | Sample data. * 2018 data are missing for the Harvard National Forensics Tournament.

Data are tabulated from ten tournaments across the past four years, amounting to 39 tournaments, 123 rounds, more than 150 individual sessions, and 6,870 entries. Competitors are primarily high school students in grades 10 to 12 from both public and private high schools across the country. The location of tournaments spans the country, ranging from New Haven to Atlanta to Phoenix.

How does gender affect debaters' chance of advancing to the next round?

I examine two stages of advancement: from the preliminary round to the elimination round and from the preliminary round to the final round. At each stage, competitors who are ranked in the top third of the competitors in a session advance. This usually includes the top 3-6 competitors in each individual chamber. To evaluate if, and to what extent, there is a gender disparity in the competitors consistently ranking in the top third and advancing, I examine the percentage of entries who advance to both the elimination and final round by gender.

Advancement rate = advancing male-identified / female-identified entries ÷ total male-identified / female-identified entries

At both stages, I find that male-identified debaters are significantly more likely than female-identified debaters to advance to the next round. For advancement from the preliminary round to the elimination round, Figure 2 depicts a difference between male-identified and female-identified advancement rates of 4.97 percentage points. The likelihood of advancing to the elimination round is 14.96% higher for male-identified debaters than female-identified debaters.

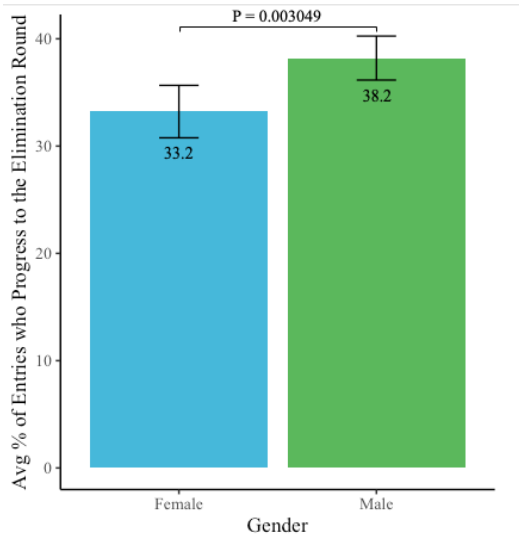

Figure 2. | Advancement to the elimination round by gender. Fewer women than men advance to the elimination round as a percentage of entries in the tournament, t(73.778)= -3.0639.

The consequence of male-identified debaters experiencing such an advantage in advancement to the elimination round is female-identified debaters who should advance to the elimination round being eliminated from the tournament following the preliminary round. I quantify this deficit with the following equation.

Early eliminations = (proportion of the preliminary round who are female-identified x the total number of advancing entries) – advancing female-identified entries

The variation in tournament size prevents my translation of this disparity to an average number of female-identified debaters who suffer statistically early elimination at each tournament because tournaments like Harvard and Yale with many more competitors than the average tournament, and consequently more competitors advancing to the elimination round, would distort the average. Resistant to the distortion of larger tournaments, however, are calculations without tournament specific denominators such as a composite measure of women who were eliminated from the tournament earlier than projected under the null hypothesis - that women and men advance to elimination rounds at equal rates. I find that over the past four years in the ten tournaments studied, a sample of 2886 women, a total of 88 female-identified debaters that were projected to advance to the elimination round did not, representing 3% of female entries. This is the equivalent of 22 female-identified debaters being prematurely eliminated prior to the elimination round every year in the ten tournaments studied.

The disparity between male-identified and female-identified advancement rates remains significant at the second stage of advancement analyzed: advancement from the preliminary round, through the elimination round, and to the final round. In fact, the disadvantage suffered by female-identified debaters in this stage of advancement grows larger than in the previous stage of advancement to the elimination round. Simultaneously, the advantage enjoyed by male-identified debaters nearly doubles. Figure 3 shows that, as a percentage of respective entries, female-identified debaters advance to the final round at an absolute rate 3.01 percentage points lower than that of their male-identified counterparts. Accordingly, male-identified debaters are 32.09% more likely to advance from the preliminary round to the final round relative to female-identified debaters.

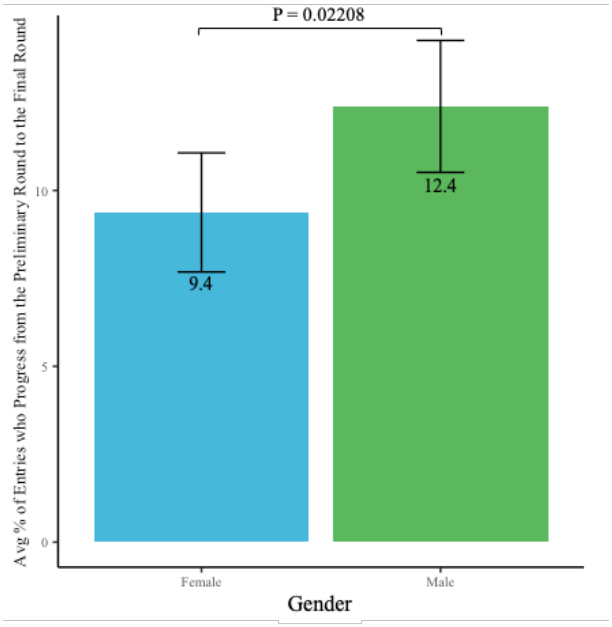

Figure 3. | Advancement to the final round by gender. Fewer women than men advance to the final round as a percentage of entries in the tournament, t(75.225)= -2.3374.

I apply the same equation for early eliminations to final round advancement, finding that, in the tournaments studied, there occurred 49 statistically early eliminations of female-identified debaters, representing 5% of the elimination round sample of 986 women. Roughly 12 female-identified debaters who, in the absence of the disparity I find, would have advanced to the final round are eliminated in the elimination round each year. While tournaments' selection of quality judges in the preliminary round is limited by the number of judges available, the fewer number of sessions in the elimination round leaves tournaments with a relatively higher number of judges to choose from to judge elimination sessions. This is why many national tournaments pay special attention to the diversity and experience of judges judging the elimination round, choosing higher quality judges to evaluate the elimination round than the preliminary round (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021). Yet, despite, the

supposedly more experienced and equitable judging panels selected for the elimination round, the disparity between male-identified and female-identified advancement rates grows substantially.

Are congress rounds dominated by male-identified debaters?

"Male Dominance" is challenging to evaluate, being a subjective measure. A simple majority is often used as an indication of dominance. I opt for a measure adjusted to real population demographics to ensure dominance within the sample is representative of dominance in the US population. 49% of US teens (15-19) are female (Statista, 2020). Thus, the threshold that must be surpassed to constitute male dominance is 51%. Under this definition, Figure 4 shows the preliminary, elimination, and final round all to be consistently male-dominated, with female-identified debaters composing a maximum average of 42.07% of the round in the preliminary round. Even in this preliminary round, which includes all competitors entered in the tournament, there are 37.68% more male-identified debaters present relative to female-identified debaters.

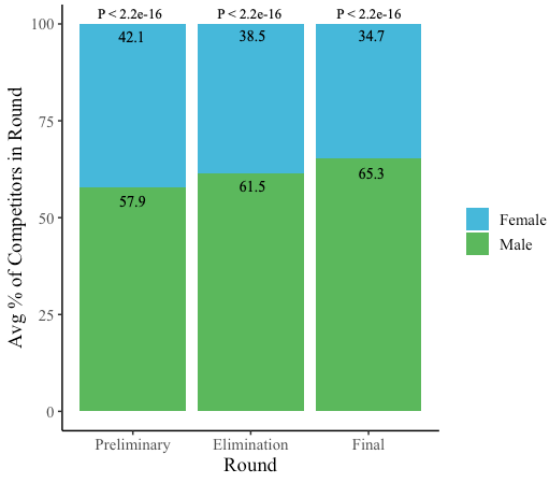

Figure 4. | Round composition by gender. Women comprise a minority of the round in all rounds. Preliminary round, t(76)= -13.181. Elimination round, t(76) = -16.97. Final round, t(76) = -11.255.

While the entrance gap between genders is certainly profound, Figure 5 displays how, as tournaments progress to elimination and final rounds, the gap between female-identified debaters and male-identified debaters present in the round widens. As disparities accumulate with each round of cuts, female-identified debaters make up a smaller and smaller proportion of students in the round. This is especially true as the disadvantage that women experience grows in the second advancement stage to the final round.

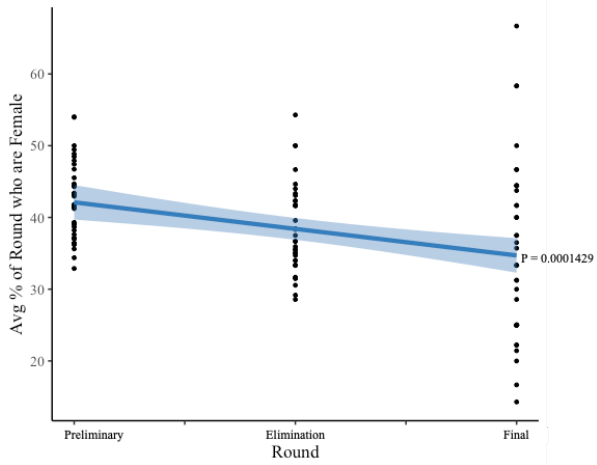

Figure 5. | Percentage of round who are female over the course of tournament. The percentage of elimination and final rounds who are female decreases over the course of tournaments, $R^2 = 0.1187$, $F(1, 115) = 15.48$.

Each round, there is a 3.70 percentage point decrease in the percentage of the round who are female-identified. As a result, there are 59.94% more male-identified debaters relative to female-identified debaters in the

elimination round and 88.35% more male-identified debaters relative to female-identified debaters in the final round on average. As the competitive disadvantage female-identified debaters suffer grows, the percentage of the round that they compose shrinks. However, the extent to which this is true varies greatly depending on the tournament. The variability of the percentage of the round who are female-identified increases as tournaments progress through the elimination round and final round. In the preliminary round, the distribution of female-identified round composition is largely centralized around the mean of 42%. However, the range and variance of elimination and final round composition data is much larger explaining why only roughly 12% of the round composition data can be explained by the linear model. To be drawn from this fact is simply that the disparity found at any one tournament is not necessarily representative of those seen at other national tournaments as there is variation especially in the composition of final rounds with the percentage of the round who are female-identified ranging from below 10% to above 70%. The trends found and depicted are averages, assumed to be representative of the national circuit, but it is important to remember that considerable variability exists within the sample and population.

Are gender disparities disappearing over time?

The simple answer to this question is no, at least not significantly. The only significant improvement I find is in the composition of the elimination round. Each year, the linear model in Figure 6 reveals that there is a 2.06 percentage point increase in the percentage of the elimination round that is female-identified. However, the correlation yielding this increase is weak with the model only explaining 14.56% of the variability in the percent of the elimination round who are female-identified. While the elimination round composition increase remains statistically significant, the 1.12 and 1.37 percentage point increases experienced by the preliminary round and final round respectively over the past four years are too marginal to achieve statistical significance.

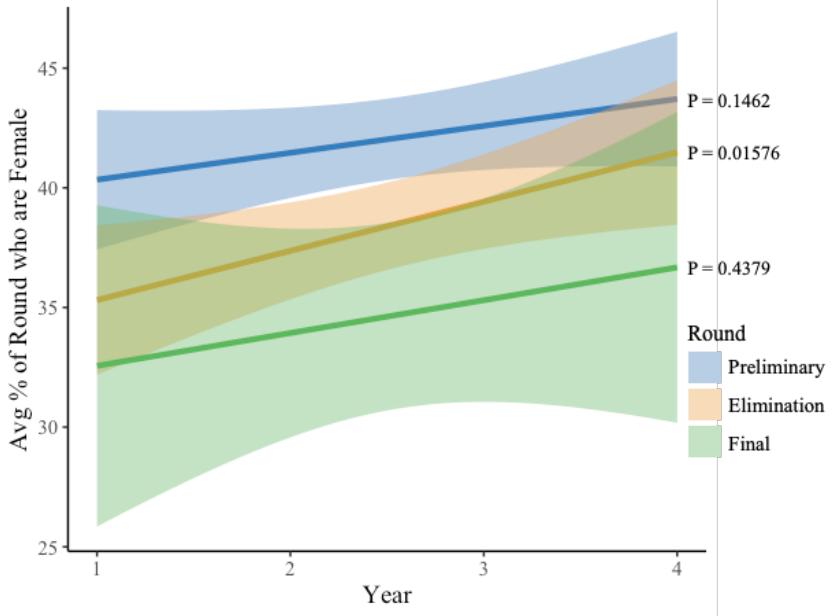

Figure 6. | Round composition by gender over the past four years. The percentage of the round who are female increases marginally over time. Year 1 refers to the least recent year (2016/17) and year 4 is the most recent year (2020/21). Preliminary round, $R^2 = 0.05619$, $F(1, 37) = 2.203$. Elimination round, $R^2 = 0.1476$, $F(1, 37) = 6.406$. Final round, $R^2 = 0.01635$, $F(1, 37) = 0.6149$.

The evolution of the final round over time has a noticeably larger error margin than the first two rounds. The broad error margin reaffirms the variability in final round composition, but also indicates the variability in how that composition fluctuates over time. While some tournaments' final rounds have trended towards equal gender representation, some have made no progress or even become more male-dominated.

The same general lack of statistically significant improvement holds true for round advancement. As shown in Figure 7, the percentage of female-identified entries advancing to the elimination round increases 0.65 percentage points every year while the percentage of male-identified entries advancing decreases 0.73 points per year. Neither of these changes are statistically significant, so should not be interpreted as changes.

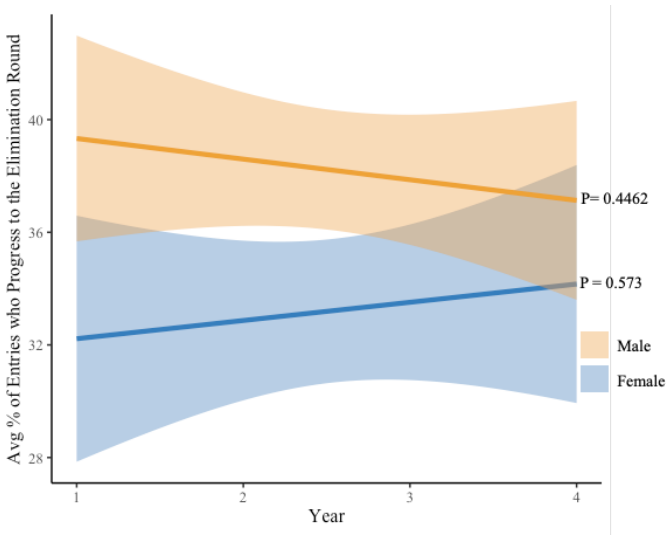

Figure 7. | Advancement to the elimination round by gender over the past four years. The percentage of women progressing to the elimination round increases over time. Female-identified, $R^2 = 0.008665$, $F(1, 37) = 3.34$. Male-identified, $R^2 = 0.1577$, $F(1, 37) = .5927$.

The regressions shown in Figure 8, depicting changes in advancement to the final round are also insignificant. While the percentage of male-identified entries advancing all the way to the final round decreases by an average of 1.35 percentage points per year, the percentage of female-identified entries making the same advancement declines by 0.13 points every year. Both advancement rates declining, albeit insignificantly, over time indicates that the number of students entered in tournaments is growing. With a higher number of female-identified and male-identified entries, advancement to the elimination round, in tournaments which have held the number of elimination rounds constant amidst growing entry pools, becomes more competitive leading to a lower percentage of entries advancing.

Interestingly, over the past four years, female-identified debaters have become slightly less likely to advance to the final round compared to male-identified debaters. However, the correlation is not significant and exceedingly weak, so advancement to the final round has not become more or less equitable in the past four years.

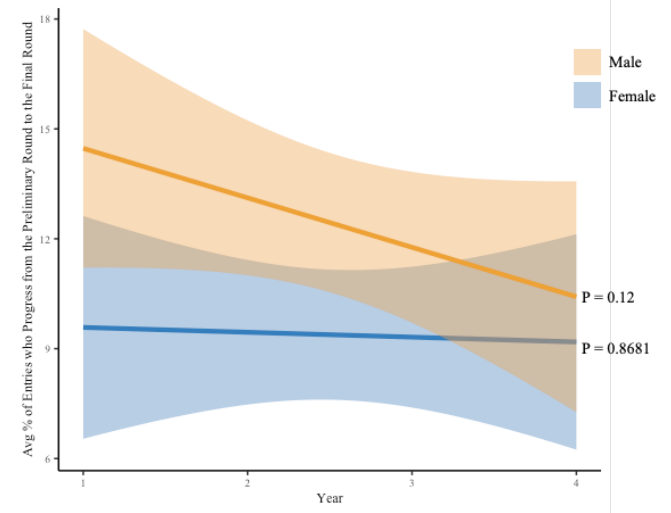

Figure 8. | Advancement to the final round from the preliminary round by gender over the past four years. The percentage of women progressing to the final round from the preliminary round decreases over time. Female-identified, $R^2 = 0.0007552$, $F(1, 37) = 0.02796$. Male-identified, $R^2 = 0.06408$, $F(1, 37) = 2.533$.

Is there sexism in Congressional Debate?

I ask two central questions to assess the role of gender in Congressional Debate: whether (1) rounds are male-dominated and (2) women are less likely to advance to the elimination and final round. I find that all three rounds, on average, tend to be male-dominated, crossing the 51% population parameter, with 38% more male-identified students entered in the tournament in preliminary rounds than female-identified students, 60% more male-identified students than female-identified students in elimination rounds, and 88% more male-identified students than female-identified students in final rounds. Concerning advancement, I find that gender significantly impacts outcomes for debaters. The likelihood of male-identified debaters advancing to the elimination round is 15% higher than for female-identified debaters. Around double the disparity in elimination advancement, the likelihood of male-identified debaters advancing to the final round is 32% higher than it is for female-identified debaters. As tournaments progress, the advancement inequity faced by female-identified debaters grows which leads to the 4-percentage point decrease in the percentage of the round who are female-identified each round.

An especially interesting finding to explain is how, despite generally more experienced judges evaluating the elimination round than the preliminary round (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021), the disparity faced by female-identified debaters in advancing to the final round is around double the disparity they face in advancing to the elimination round. Predicting precisely why this growth consistently occurs is challenging, but there are a number of plausible explanations. One is that the "boys' club" exercises more influence over which competitor is elected to be presiding officer (PO) in the elimination round, skewing outcomes. In the preliminary round, competitors who are new to Congress or traditionally not as successful serve to counter balance the "circuit" debaters who frequently advance to elimination and final rounds at national tournaments, a group of primarily men. In the preliminary sessions, this group of debaters cannot orchestrate PO elections uncontested because the majority of each chamber is less experienced debaters whose votes for PO are unpredictable. However, with many of these newer debaters eliminated in the first stage of advancement, the circuit debaters make up a higher proportion of each chamber in elimination sessions, giving them more power to determine the PO. The result is POs, who were elected by their friends in the chamber, selecting those friends, other members of the boys' club, to speak earlier (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021) granting them the aforementioned benefits of having priority in the recency list. The prediction is that as the relative influence of male circuit debaters grows in the elimination round, the disparity suffered by women in advancement to the next round does as well.

Another hypothesis for the growth in disparity in the second stage of advancement is the different speaking style that the group of circuit debaters practice. In the preliminary round, there are a number of diverse speaking styles amongst competitors, but advancement to the elimination round brings directional unity towards a style with a more pronounced focus on solid, intricate argumentation which is taught by summer Speech and Debate institutes and most resourced schools. Ideally, a focus on arguments rather than presentation would minimize the impact of gender biases against women as they would be evaluated on their content and not how they deliver it. However, argumentation elements drawn from Policy Debate around 2010 and infused into other events like Public Forum and, increasingly Congress, inherently impact presentation and, in doing so, promote a style that capitalizes on implicit biases against women (R. Kawolics, personal communication, 2021). To cover more arguments, competitors must talk faster. To engage persuasively at the argumentative, refutational level, competitors must speak assertively. These elements hurt women because judges have biases against women who speak assertively and quickly as they are more likely to be perceived as pitchy and overly aggressive (Kawolics, 2019).

A final explanation for why the advancement gender gap increases in advancement to the final round is that while the judges selected to judge the elimination round are traditionally more experienced, this experience yields a degree of bias. This bias is not always subconscious and sometimes manifests explicitly with Debate alumni who are now experienced judges simply ranking their friends in the chambers they judge highly. However, confirmation bias likely plays a larger role. If a judge has coached for decades or a former competitor has been judging the entire season, they develop an idea of which schools produce "winning" debaters and which individual debaters often advance to the final round. Consequently, these judges are subconsciously looking for positive attributes to rank well-known, successful debaters highly, confirming their prior belief about the student (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021). This hurts less well-known debaters, of whom women make up a higher proportion than the circuit debaters, as judges are, conversely, looking for flaws in speaking and argumentation warranting a lower rank. Experienced judges are a double-edged sword and one of a few different factors that could explain the nearly two-fold increase in the gender inequity women experience in advancement to the final round.

This study has touched on a number of explanations for gender inequity in Congress more broadly. The simplest one, and most viable, is judge bias. We all have implicit biases against women, Congressional Debate judges are no exception. Their ranks could simply reflect individual conscious or unconscious bias, but averaged with hundreds of other judges' ranks show a trend of true gender discrimination. Both experienced and inexperienced judges' biases against women can take the form of confirmation bias, incentivizing the

disproportionate observation of favorable characteristics in male debaters. I would speculate that another reason for gender inequity in Congressional Debate exists unique to the event itself: the power of the presiding officer (PO). Essentially determining who gets the most speaking time in a session, the POs have the ability to make female debaters less memorable to judges. While judge and PO bias stand out as potential factors, there remain a plethora of potential reasons for the gender disparities I identify in congress. For example, there are differences in how coaches mentor female and male debaters which certainly affects which students enter certain speech or debate events (R. Kawolics, personal communication, 2021), but could also impact female debaters' chances of advancement. These reasons and others appear plausible, but understanding why gender discrimination persists in public speaking and politics at any level is infinitely complex and challenging to assess through statistics. Ultimately, the disparity I uncover is troubling because it calls into question the larger purpose of Congressional Debate. The event is often regarded as equipping students with the knowledge and speaking skills to be effective leaders and advocates. However, with such inequity it may simply be ingraining the sexism so prevalent in our broader society at a young age. In doing so, Congressional Debate could be perpetuating the gender injustices of our world that it has the power to prepare students to correct.

Progress

The third question I examine is how measures of composition and advancement change over time. I find little evidence that they have changed at all, the only change of significance being a 2.06 percentage point per year increase in the percentage of the elimination round who are female-identified. Although this coefficient represents annual improvement, because there is no significant change in the proportion of female-identified entries advancing to the elimination round, the increase in the percentage of the elimination round who are female-identified is likely due to both the slightly more significant drop in male-identified debaters advancing to the elimination round and an increase in total number of female-identified debaters entered in the tournament.

The disparity in advancement and, thus, composition of the elimination and final round is perhaps harder to correct as it is the result of systemic bias and discrimination. What is particularly startling, however, is that despite calls for increased female involvement in the activity, the entry gap has not closed over the past four years in a significant way. This points to a persistent need to get girls involved in Debate however daunting the disparities this study reveals may be. Whether this be through a summer camp for younger female-presenting debaters or an afterschool program for middle school girls interested in Debate, action is needed to increase female involvement in Congressional Debate. Getting more women interested and entered into tournaments is the first step to changing the administrative conversation. Kevin Berlat, who has coached for years and served on Tab Staffs across the country, recalls how Congressional Debate has experienced concentrated restructuring about every 20 years rather than gradual reform each year (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021). He thinks we are bordering another stage of extensive reform, one which prioritizes equity. What progress has occurred in the past four years is a reason to hope for further improvements in the future. However, it is clear that increased awareness of gender inequity in Congress and structural changes are necessary because time alone has not corrected the sexism in the event.

The Problem with Gender Assignment and TOC Inclusion

Admittedly, this study has room for error in its methods. The process by which I determined the gender of each debater entered in the tournaments is not reliable. Many students did not list their pronouns in their social media bios. In this case I was left to assume students' genders based on photos available which inevitably required defaulting to gender stereotypes with no alternative. In the case that the student had no social media, I simply guessed their gender based on their first names. Once again, I relied on my knowledge of what is traditionally a male or female name with essentially no allowance for students who may have been non-binary. In all of my web searching to find students' social media and pronouns, I only found one student who explicitly used pronouns besides she/her or he/him. Due to the negligible sample of non-binary debaters, I omitted them from the study. I see no way to avoid the error inherent to gender assignment in a study such as this one, but still recognize it. The gender guess rate was only approximately one for every 50 debaters, so I assume my results are reliable.

The second place there is room for error is in my inclusion of the two major end-of-year national tournaments in my sample: NSDA Senate Nationals and the Tournament of Champions (TOC), especially the latter. I felt compelled to include both of these tournaments in data collection due to their size and importance to the Congressional Debate circuit. However, this call may have distorted the averages I find as it precludes the assumption that individual trials are independent. Both tournaments are unique in that students must qualify to enter. Qualifying for the TOC is notoriously difficult as debaters must collect two "bids" by making it to either the semifinals or finals at other prominent national tournaments. The fact that female-presenting debaters are less likely

to advance to these elimination rounds and, thus, earn enough bids to qualify to the TOC is why I find the TOC consistently has fewer female-identified entries than any other tournament. The TOC's profound entry gap pulled the average percentage of entries who are female-identified down. On the other hand, female-identified debaters at the TOC are more likely to advance to the elimination round and even final round than both male-identified debaters at the TOC and female-identified debaters at any other tournament. There are a few potential reasons for why this is the case. The first is simply that there are so few female-identified debaters entered in the TOC to begin with, so if just a few of them advance to the elimination round, they compose a higher proportion of the meager total female-identified entries than seen with the male-identified entries. Second, female-presenting debaters who have qualified and entered in the TOC may just be better debaters than their male-presenting counterparts. To qualify for the TOC, they had to be good enough to overcome proven discrimination against them making them exceptional in their ability compared to male-presenting debaters. Third, the TOC tends to provide more qualified and experienced judges than any other tournament on the circuit. This leads me to believe they may be less gender biased and truly judge students more on the merits of their debating and speaking. Regardless, the consequence of TOC inclusion regarding advancement is an inflated value for the percentage of female-identified entries who advance to elimination and final round. Without including the TOC, I predict the number of female-identified entries to be higher but the percentage of them who advance to the elimination and final rounds to be lower. While the two tournaments in the sample that require qualification create a different environment for sexism to operate in, I stand by my decision to include them. They are symbols of the epitome of Student Congress and where the event is headed. The disparities present there speak volumes about the event as a whole, necessitating their inclusion in the sample.

Comparison to Women in Public Forum Debate and the United States Congress

I compare the participation and success of women in Student Congress, Public Forum Debate, and US Congress not to determine which subset of women suffer the worst disadvantage, but to examine if such a disadvantage transcends all three spaces of political competition. At all three levels, women experience a competitive disadvantage albeit to the differing degrees shown in Table 2.

	Student Congress	Public Forum	US Congress	StuCo-PF	StuCo-USCo
% of the preliminary round who are female	42.1	42 [1]	13 [3]	0.1	29.1
% of the elimination round who are female	38.5	24 [2]	27 [4]	14.5	11.5

Table 2. | Comparison to PF and US Congress. Congressional Debate performing more equitably than Public Forum debate and the United States Congress in both composition and advancement. [1](Kawolics and Lynn, 2018). [2] Let elimination round participants be defined as competitors advancing to at least the quarterfinal round, the level of advancement studied by Kawolics and his team (Kawolics and Lynn, 2018). [3]Let all of the candidates in US congressional races be considered the entries in a preliminary round (Shames, 2015). [4]Let the candidates elected to congress be considered as advancing to the elimination round (Blazina and Desilver, 2021).

The female participation rate in Congressional Debate and Public Forum (PF) is almost identical at roughly 42%. This number drops significantly with advancement to the elimination round where female-identified debaters compose an even smaller percentage of the round. In the elimination round, female-identified debaters in Congressional Debate make up a share of the round that is 14.5 percentage points higher than for female-identified debaters in PF. This difference, however, would shrink if, in studying PF, rounds preceding the quarterfinal round were considered. In an octa final PF round, there are more female debaters as a percentage of everyone in the round than there are after another round of cuts that give way to the quarter final round. The comparison is limited due to current circuit wide PF analysis excluding some intermediary elimination rounds. The fact remains, though, that in both debate events, preliminary and elimination rounds have significantly more male-identified debaters and that "female representation steadily declines from preliminary rounds through eliminations" (Kawolics and Lynn, 2018). Behind widening composition gaps between female-identified and male-identified debaters is that, in both events, female-identified debaters are less likely to advance to elimination and final rounds than are male-identified debaters. Every year, 16 female-identified PF debaters and 22 female-identified Congressional Debaters are eliminated statistically early, prior to the elimination round. Another disheartening similarity between my findings and Kawolic's is the lack of improvement we find over time. He and Lynn actually find that success rates for female-identified debaters have, on average, declined recently (Kawolics and Lynn, 2018). In a more specific analysis of qualification to the NSDA National Tournament, they find no change to the female qualification rate

since 2010. This stagnancy aligns with the absence of significant change I find in Congressional Debate over time, excluding elimination round composition. The reasoning behind it may be similar as well: the recent norming of Policy debate elements in other debate events hurts women (R. Kawolics, personal communication, 2021) which, in the case of PF, has made the event less equitable, and potentially in the case of Congress, counteracted improvements, precluding the event's significant movement towards equity.

The comparison between Student Congress and US Congress paints a more hopeful picture. It is true that the participation and winning rates for women in both bodies are far below where they are expected to be under the assumption of equity. Gender injustice exists in Student and US Congress. What gives me hope, however, is that the female participation rate is much higher in Student Congress than it is in US Congress. This suggests that today's generation of young women is more likely to engage in political competition and be treated fairly in doing so. As female Congressional Debaters age, they have the potential to usher in a more equitable era for the US Congress and American politics more broadly. However, early interest in politics is not guaranteed to translate to a political career, especially when unjust barriers are experienced during that early exposure. The comparison between US and Student Congress reiterates the need to reduce these barriers as not to continue discouraging young women from entering politics and, subsequently, the abysmal rates of female candidacy and election in American politics.

The Importance of Confronting Gender Disparities in High School Debate

Promoting equity in Congressional Debate has two impacts. The first is the inherent benefit of gender equity: male and female debaters having an equal shot at advancing to elimination and final rounds. An equitable Student Congress would no longer see female debaters penalized for their gender. More women would place highly at tournaments, winning prestige in the Speech and Debate community and impressive academic distinction for resumes, as well as gaining access to larger opportunities such as college scholarships. As a result, it is likely that we would experience the second benefit: more women participating in Congressional Debate. A major reason why women are discouraged from participating in "male-dominated" academic events like Debate or Robotics is the sexism in these events. If some of that sexism were to be reduced, I think it plausible that more young female students would sign up for Congressional Debate and enter tournaments.

Once this impact is accessed, it opens the door for a number of more far reaching benefits to occur. Early exposure to competition and political discourse are leading factors in whether students decide to run for congress post-graduation. Thus, exposing more women to Debate could see a higher number of women participating in future congressional races. Having more women in the US Congress is critical to passing more gender equity policies. While male representatives and senators do sponsor and vote for pro-women's rights legislation, there remains a special alignment between descriptive and substantive representation. Women are more likely to represent the interests of women in Congress (Allen, 2004; Swers, 2005). For example, female legislators co-sponsor an average of 5.3 more women's health bills than liberal male legislators (Swers, 2005). Female representation matters – not only for women seeking equal pay, paid maternal leave, or healthcare coverage, but for all voters because women are more productive legislators. On average, they pass twice as many bills as male legislators (Brush, 2020) and bring in 9% more funds to their districts than male legislators (Anzia, 2011). Amidst political gridlock and congressional complacency, women continue to enact more legislation and secure more funding for their districts. Encouraging more women to run for Congress is central to advancing the political fight for gender equity as well as a more productive legislature. Disparities in High School Debate are individually important, but even more so because they are representative of a larger culture which permits gender injustice (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021).

Making Congressional Debate More Equitable

Having identified substantial gender disparities within Congressional Debate, addressing the roots of these inequities requires a comprehensive approach. Alex Gordon, one of the most successful Congressional Debaters of the past decade and President of the Yale Debate Association, defines equity in Congress as a set of enacted practices to ensure everyone is treated fairly. He emphasizes a "set of choices to promote and preserve equity" because while encouraging a more equitable mindset and culture is important, students, judges, and tabulators will implicitly or consciously diverge from equity in the absence of codified practices (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021). Such practices and choices can be categorized by whose role they regulate: students, coaches, and judges.

Students

Congress is unique in the liberty it affords students to determine how sessions proceed. Even before the day of the session, competitors contact each other to set the order in which they would like to debate the legislation in

the session. This is important because when tournaments release the legislation a week or two prior to the tournament, they almost always publish more bills, resolutions, and amendments than students are able to debate in the time allotted. In efforts to reduce the time necessary to prepare for the tournament, students entered in the tournament reach out to each other through social media to decide which pieces of legislation they want to debate, putting them at the top of the agenda, and which ones they don't, putting them at the bottom of the agenda. This pre-round negotiating can be equitable as well as inequitable. Setting an agenda ahead of time allows students from smaller schools with fewer resources, generally programs with more students from marginalized groups, to more adequately prepare for rounds because they only have to research about two thirds of the pieces of legislation they would have had to prepare without a preset agenda (B. Stanchik, personal communication, 2021). However, the problem with students' pre-setting the agenda is that it excludes students without social media and students from lesser known, smaller debate programs who don't have connections with other schools and debaters (Ke. and Ki. Berlat, personal communication, 2021; A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021). If students from smaller programs do not know the preset agenda, they are hurt in round as the students who decided the agenda for the whole chamber were able to concentrate their research on the legislation they knew would be debated, while the excluded students split their time across all of the legislation. An increasingly common solution to this inequity is for tournaments to withhold entry lists and chamber assignments. These "blind chambers" are meant to prohibit pre-tournament collaboration on the agenda and PO elections as students do not know who they will be debating in the round until right before the round. Blind chambers are a plausible solution to pre-tournament inequity but do not contend with how presetting agendas actually can be equitable. Moreover, because agenda presetting is so advantageous, students find a way to do it regardless of blind chambers (B. Stanchik, personal communication, 2021). Beyond blind chambers' often being ineffectual, they could actually open the door for more inequity. When students do not know who is entered in the tournament or who is in their chamber, "circuit" debaters simply reach out to all of their friends to pre-set the agenda and orchestrate POs. While telling students who is in their chamber gives students the opportunity to include new or lesser known competitors in pre-tournament discussions, withholding that information guarantees that the only students included in said discussions are those that already know each other. Blind chambers are an excellent idea in theory, but making them effective at limiting pre-tournament negotiations, and, thus, equitable has proven to be challenging.

During the session, one student in particular, the PO, maintains control over allocating advantages via who they select to speak when. It is widely accepted that POs do not grant early speeches equitably, leading to more speeches for those the POs favor. There prevail generally two schools of thought in how to confront this inequity. The first is the idea that PO bias can be minimized with training. POs should be trained to not select their friends, who they think is good, or who can help them in later rounds, but rather choose students randomly (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021). While coaches play a big part in training POs to be equitable, tournaments could hold equity briefings before the first round to remind students to be fair as they do in collegiate Debate (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021). In fact, to balance against the biases of judges, some coaches teach a method of presiding called progressive PO-ing in which POs select women, people of color, and non-binary debaters before White cis male debaters (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021).

The second mentality regarding how to eliminate PO bias is to implement policies that expressly limit the extent to which POs' bias affects outcomes. Tournaments over the past few years have seen success in utilizing "preset precedence and recency." Under this policy, the PO gets a list at the beginning of the round, with a random speaking order. While it does not guarantee equal speaking time, it does make the speaking time allocated more equitable as the preset list tells the PO who they have to give speaking time to first (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021; A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021; B. Stanchik, personal communication, 2021). It takes the implicit and explicit bias out of the initial selection of speakers by the PO. However, many feel that removing the selection power of the PO automates their role to a degree, risking a trend towards Congress absent student POs (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021; A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021; B. Stanchik, personal communication, 2021).

Another, simpler, solution could be to ensure speaking equity and guarantee students a set number of speeches (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021). This would transition Congress to an event measured by amount of speaking per person rather than time which, while more equitable, would no longer mirrors the format of the US Congress. However, a way to make this transition without officially requiring each student be allotted a specific number of speeches and questions, is to adopt flexible end times, "soft stops," more broadly. Under an inflexible end time, everyone could have already spoken twice by the 2:10 mark but, if the tournament requires students to debate until 2:30 exactly, about four competitors will get an extra third speech in the last 20 minutes while the others do not, putting them at a competitive advantage. A soft stop gives competitors the liberty to collectively end the session once everyone has spoken an equal number of times. Of course, problems remain with

this solution as competitors with priority in the recency list recognize their advantage and often resist ending the round before they give an additional speech.

Coaches

Coaches' ability to promote or resist equity in Congress is often overlooked as inequities are blamed on sexist judges and discriminatory POs. However, coaches wield tremendous power in shaping the culture of Speech and Debate. Principally, they impact the entry gap that persists in most events. It is an incredibly harmful stereotype that women and Black students are more suited to the "easier" speech events like Dramatic Interpretation rather than debate events. However, it is a stereotype that often monopolizes coaches' decisions when steering new freshmen toward events. In order to close the entry gap in debate events, coaches must begin pushing students into events based on their interests and talents, not their identity (R. Kawolics, personal communication, 2021).

Once students have been placed in events based on merit, coaches must continue to be cognizant of equity and how this influences their coaching patterns. Kimberly Berlat, who has coached students and directed Congress tournaments for years, explains that a major change she has witnessed in Congress over the years is how coaches coach women and men. Where coaches used to discourage women from talking quickly or assertively, many coaches now instruct their female students to meet the pace and assertiveness of their male peers (Ki. Berlat, personal communication, 2021). While many coaches used to tell women to minimize their assertiveness in a contentious exchange with male debaters, it is more common today for coaches to instruct men in those circumstances to stop taking advantage of judges' higher threshold for their aggressiveness and be respectful. The Congress coaching culture has shifted to encouraging all genders to debate at the same level.

In training Congressional Debaters to preside, coaches must stress the importance of equity whether that be through requiring progressive PO-ing or anti-bias training. A critical step to promoting equity in novice placement, debate styles, and presiding is the diversification of coaches which has increased dramatically in recent years (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021). Finally, coaches must recognize the equity they can provide as judges. Because experienced administrators familiar with Speech and Debate are required for the smooth execution of a tournament, coaches find themselves in tabulation rooms running tournaments much of the time instead of judging debate rounds. This is a loss for students who are then judged by less experienced judges who are more likely to default to implicit biases (R. Kawolics, personal communication, 2021).

Judges

Since around 2014, the diversification of judges and tournament administration has been a central focus of equity efforts in Student Congress (Ke. and Ki. Berlat, personal communication, 2021). Many national tournaments attempt to provide diverse judging panels for elimination rounds. The judges for the final round at NSDA Nationals even have to pass certain screening for diversity. The importance of diverse judging panels cannot be understated, but disparities remain. So, there is a need for further training and policies regarding the judging of Congress sessions. Judges should be trained against confirmation bias (Ke. Berlat, personal communication, 2021; A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021). This includes inexperienced judges being trained against the confirmation bias that favors men as well as experienced judges being trained against the bias that favors successful "circuit" debaters or well-known schools. As a part of this training, judge briefings should always be held before the first round (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021).

Following the publication of Kawolics's findings in 2018, the NSDA implemented new anti-bias language on judging ballots (R. Kawolics, personal communication, 2021) and an equity statement at the top of each ballot (A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021) as a reminder to judge equitably. Training and statements are all in an effort to make judges more equitable, but the challenging question is whether equity mandates the evaluation of gender. Should competitors all be judged equally without regard to their gender? Or, should judges consider the gender distribution of their rankings? Ideally, everyone would be judged equally regardless of gender and that would be reflected in rankings. However, without an awareness of gender, judges run the risk of falling into implicit biases and ranking women lower without realizing it (Ki. Berlat, personal communication, 2021; A. Gordon, personal communication, 2021). Thus, judges should evaluate rounds progressively and consider gender in their rankings to ensure that they have ranked the talented women highly along with talented men.

Moving Forward

In my interview with the Berlats, Kimberly Berlat brought up the concept of "forming, storming, and norming:" the idea that new policies are drafted and implemented for the first time (forming), there is a degree of hesitance and retaliation (storming), and eventually push back dies down and the new policies gradually become the new norms (norming). She views the stage we are at right now as a sort of forming, coming out of the pandemic and virtual platform having reached many more students and with a number of new policies (Ki. Berlat, personal communication, 2021). As we witness the storming that has already started and the coming norming of new policies,

equity must be a central consideration. While the widespread adoption of new policies like flexible end times and preset recency would certainly make Congress more equitable, it is important that tournaments invest more in their existing equity initiatives. From providing more judge training to strengthening nondiscrimination statements, there is much tournaments can do to promote gender equity that does not require an overhaul of the current system or implementation of completely new policies. Indeed, when it comes to Speech and Debate, "small institutional changes can make all the difference" (Alegria, 2018). No perfect and immediate master plan for ending all discrimination in Debate exists or is expected. What is necessary, however, is acknowledgement that sexism exists in Speech and Debate and efforts, of any scale, to confront it. I echo Kawolic's call to the NSDA regarding PF for Congress: "it should not only establish a new committee to work toward eliminating disparity and sexism from the event, but should also examine any change of policy or practice through the lens of its impact on the inequity that is endemic in Debate" (Kawolics, 2019). If an equity commitment of the NSDA is truly to "promote best practices for diversity, equity, and inclusion" (NSDA, 2020), it must first admit the lack of gender equity in the community they lead and act decisively and transparently to confront it. The gender inequity Speech and Debate can perpetuate extends beyond high school tournaments, but so does its power to equip future leaders to eliminate such inequity in society. Careful reevaluation of the role played by Speech and Debate in the broader discussion of gender equity is needed by the NSDA, coaches, judges, and students alike for High School Speech and Debate to become the agent of positive change it can be.

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