

# Solving Pennsylvania's Budget Woes

## Increased Female Representation

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*Pennsylvania has a long history of failing to pass its budget by the start of the next fiscal year, often plunging the state in prolonged periods of budget impasse, and subjecting the state to a myriad of social, economic, and political consequences. This article explores the history of budget impasses in the Commonwealth, including their causes and consequences, and advances a growing trend in American politics as a potential solution to this problem—the election of more women to the General Assembly. I suggest that the addition of more female lawmakers will make the budgetary process more collegial as these political actors are prone to reach across the aisle and compromise due to patterns of socially reinforced behavioral expectations, thus bringing budgetary stalemates to a quicker resolution. The consequences of prolonged impasses on the target populations of importance to female lawmakers are explored as an impetus for engaging in this behavior.*

**P**ennsylvania has become infamous for its almost perennial inability to pass its budget on time. The ensuing budget impasses have been as brief as only a day (2006) or as long as 270 days (2015), causing the state to incur a multitude of highly visible and often costly consequences and contributing to decreased public confidence in its elected officials and increased willingness to vote out the culpable incumbents. Thus, as Pennsylvania inches closer to its June 30 deadline each year, the collective eyes of the Commonwealth,

surrounding states, and more recently the nation, turn toward Harrisburg, wondering whether July 1 will come and go without a new budget in place. In this climate of increased partisan division and polarization, many are asking what can be done to solve the state's budget woes—and according to some politicians and pundits that solution is to elect more women.

This article examines how gender influences efforts to compromise in an increasingly partisan and polarized environment. Budgets are built on compromise, without which there are tangible consequences for elected officials and their constituents. Gender differences in both style and behavior (Vinkenburg et al. 2011) characterize women with possessing a willingness to engage in consensus building and compromise (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). Pennsylvania has historically underrepresented women in the branches concerned with state budgetary negotiations. Thus, electing more women into the state government could result in more consensual behavior with an emphasis on collegiality and cooperation (Fox and Oxley 2003).

Though compromise is a necessary condition for successful budgeting, Pennsylvania's negotiations are defined by a number of elements known to complicate this process, including possessing a full-time legislature, a sizeable budget, a history of partisan division, and increasing levels of polarization. Thus, in understanding the role women can play in ameliorating the consequences of divided government and polarization, Pennsylvania provides an important case study.

This research examines the role of women in the budgetary process and operates under the premise that behavioral differences, in combination with institutional features, lead to different patterns of lawmaking between men and women. In doing so, it considers the potential outcomes associated with reducing the underrepresentation of women in political office. In the current polarized political climate, most issues would benefit from greater female-driven cooperation (Bratton and Rouse 2011). This research focuses on passing a state's budget because no government action can occur without it. Budgetary negotiations are thus an optimal case for both observing occurrences of, and considering if, gendered collaborative behavior can reduce Pennsylvania's propensity for budget impasses.

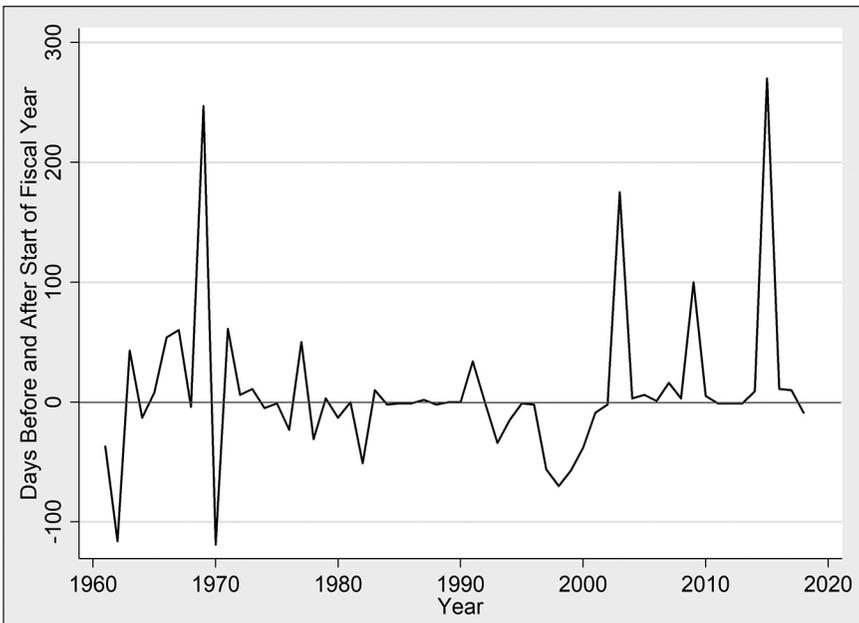
## Late Budgets

### History

Harold Lasswell defined politics as a competition over who gets what, when, and how. Developing and enacting a public budget is a prime example of politics because it's a deliberative process which sets the size and agenda of a

government by determining overall spending and where revenue is directed (Hutchinson and James 1988). Budgeting is highly conflictual with every political actor holding a stake in the outcome. Demand will always exceed supply, leading to the budget process being viewed as unsatisfactory and ultimately flawed in its outcomes (National Conference of State Legislatures 1995).

Difficult budgetary negotiations can result in a state failing to pass its budget by the start of the next fiscal year, entering the state into an impasse period. In the event of an impasse, a state employs one or more options. In 11 states temporary appropriations bills are passed. Another 12 states have provisions that allow for the continuous payment of funds and services to maintain government operations, and 22 states mandate a partial government shutdown of nonessential government services (National Conference of State Legislatures 2010). Late state budgets are not uncommon, with more than 15% of budgets from 1961 to 2006 being adopted after the start of the next fiscal year (Klarner, Phillips, and Muckler 2012). Pennsylvania itself has a long history of failing to pass its budget by its July 1 fiscal year deadline (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Pennsylvania Budget Adoption Historical (1961–2018). *Note:* Positive values denote a budget that was signed *after* the July 1 statutory deadline (a late budget), and negative values denote a budget that was signed *before* the July 1 statutory deadlines (an on-time budget). (Source: 1961–2006 adapted from Klarner, Phillips, and Muckler [2012]; 2008–2018 updated from [https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/CL/Public/cl\\_view.cfm](https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/CL/Public/cl_view.cfm).)

Between 1961 and 2018, 25 of Pennsylvania's 58 budgets (43.1%) were late, being passed an average 44.4 days after the start of the fiscal year, with the longest impasse (270 days) occurring in 2015. Notable impasses have resulted from attempts to increase taxes to meet spending increases or reduce deficits. Until recently, Pennsylvania employed a mixture of the aforementioned procedures in the event of an impasse, passing continuing resolutions and enacting a partial shutdown of nonessential functions.

In 2007 a new interpretation of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) advanced by the Rendell administration prohibited noncritical employees from performing their duties because the Commonwealth had no authority to pay them during a budget impasse (Needles 2009). Budget disputes led to the furloughing of 25,000 noncritical employees, prompting an unsuccessful lawsuit for summary relief filed by the state's major labor unions. When budget disputes arose again in 2009, the Rendell administration interpreted the prior Commonwealth court decision such that while it could no longer furlough state employees, it could, however, order them to work without pay during an impasse. As the resulting 101-day impasse stretched on, noncritical employees found the words "Budget Impasse Leave without Pay" printed on their paychecks.

The act of these "payless paydays" prompted an appeal to the state Supreme Court. On December 28, 2009, Chief Justice Castille wrote for the 6-1 majority that the FLSA's requirement of timely pay for work performed during a budget impasse overrode Pennsylvania's Constitutional provision barring dispersal of funds from the Treasury until they were authorized in a budget (Fitzsimmons 2009). This fundamentally changed how the Commonwealth would operate during a budget impasse. The decision ensured that state workers would no longer face payless paydays, no matter the duration of the budget impasse. As a result, most functions the public relies on will continue as agencies must tap into reserves to pay employees until a new budget restores the state funding (Meyer 2015). With nonessential workers no longer being furloughed, and the most tangible indicators of an impasse no longer in play, only if an impasse languishes on will the general public start to feel an impact from the breakdown in budgetary negotiations.

While these procedural changes have altered the way that the Commonwealth responds to a budget impasse, they have not changed its propensity for engaging in fiscal brinksmanship for the duration of these impasses (should they occur), as evidenced by the recent 2015 impasses. As such, it is necessary to understand why Pennsylvania and other states fail to pass their budgets on time, and how they might avert future impasses.

Literature on budget impasses in the American states has shown that a variety of institutional, economic, and political factors influence the duration of budget impasses. Budget resolution is made more difficult by: the fiscal health of the state magnifying divergence over spending priorities (Klarner, Phillips, and Muckler 2012), the complexity of a state’s budget (Klarner, Phillips, and Muckler 2012), supermajority requirements for appropriations bill adoption (Pulsipher 2004), legislative professionalism allowing for protracted budgetary negotiations (Kousser and Phillips 2009), and whether there was an attempt to increase taxes (McLaughlin 2012).

Two additional factors are of particular importance for understanding budget impasses in Pennsylvania. The first concerns Pennsylvania’s history of divided government. Budgetary disputes are exacerbated during times of divided government when the most fundamental interests of the governor and the legislature now run counter as each branch/party seeks to pursue a budget in line with its ideological and policy goals (Bowling and Ferguson 2001). Figure 2 below allows for an examination of the partisan composition of Pennsylvania’s government overtime as viewed through the lens of the occurrence of budgetary failures.

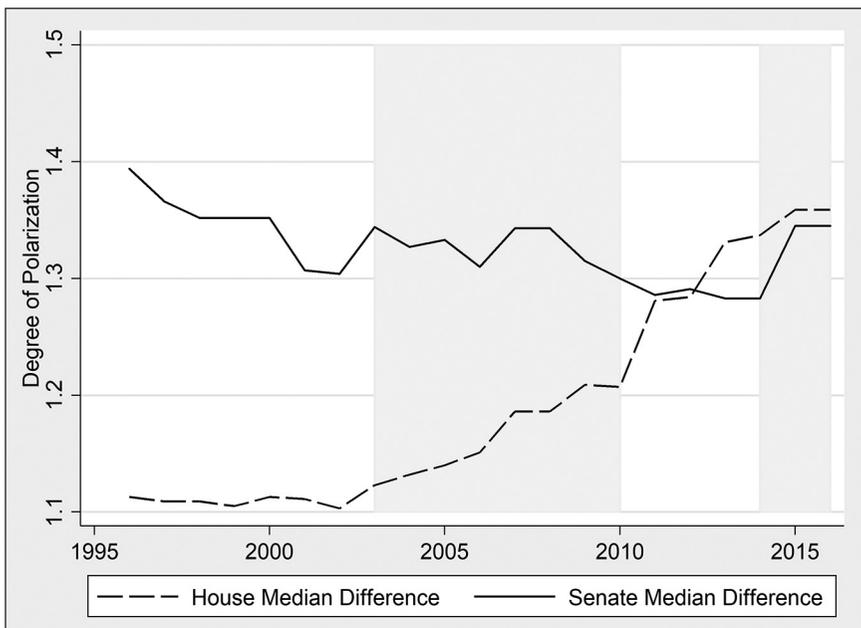
An important temporal effect is observed in the above table, where prior to 1972, it was not uncommon to observe a late budget during periods of unified government. During this period, disagreements between partisan allies were often punished in subsequent elections resulting in the loss of majority control in the lower chamber. After 1972, the point when the General Assembly

<b>Governor</b>	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D			
<b>House</b>	D	D	R	R	D	D	R	R	D	D	D	R	R	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D			
<b>Senate</b>	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R			
	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
<b>Governor</b>	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D
<b>House</b>	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
<b>Senate</b>	R	R	R	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018

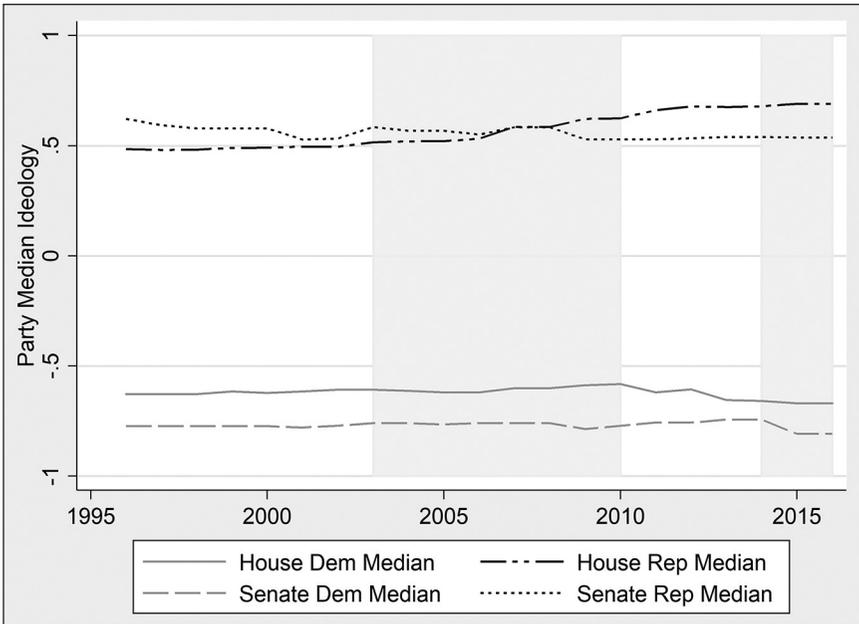
**Figure 2.** Historical Partisan Control of Pennsylvania’s Government (1961–2018). *Note:* Shaded cells indicate years that a budget was passed after the start of the fiscal year, i.e., “late.” (Source: 1961–2011, adapted from Klarner [2013]; 2012–2018 updated via Council of State Government’s Book of the States.)

began to modernize (McLaughlin 2012), every budget impasse (except 2014) has occurred under divided government. This is consistent with prior studies of impasses in the era of legislative professionalism which show that divided government presents a significant hurdle in the state's ability to pass its budget on time (Andersen, Lassen, and Nielsen 2012; Kirkland and Phillips 2018).

Second, the trend in ideological polarization is making the budget (and policy) process more difficult. Parties at both the national and state levels have become more ideologically homogenous (Wright and Birkhead 2014) and ultimately more polarized (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2016). Increasing polarization truly is becoming "undeniably the central and most problematic feature of contemporary American politics" (Mann and Ornstein 2016, 44), as it increases gridlock (Barber and McCarty 2013). When considering budgeting, the rise of more ideologically disciplined parties reduces the ability of legislators to act as free agents and makes distributive bargaining more difficult (Binder and Lee 2015). Since voters do not have a negative view of more polarized legislatures (Richardson and Milyo 2016) and fail to sanction legislators for ideologically extremity (Rogers 2017), polarization may intensify partisan division. Thus, during periods of partisan division when the parties are more ideologically disparate, compromise becomes more difficult as positions within the ideological gap are less tenable. Figures 3 and 4 allow for an



**Figure 3.** Pennsylvania General Assembly Ideological Polarization (1996–2016): Chamber Medians. (Source: Adapted from Shor and McCarty [2011].)



**Figure 4.** Pennsylvania General Assembly Ideological Polarization (1996–2016): Party Medians. (Source: Adapted from Shor and McCarty [2011].)

examination of the increase of ideological polarization by both chamber and party, again as viewed through the lens of the occurrence of late budgets.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, polarization has increased over time, with the greatest degree of polarization occurring in the lower chamber, particularly within the Republican party. The degree of polarization makes compromise more difficult, in particular when attempting to bring an impasse to an end (Birkhead 2016).

Taken together, Pennsylvania is in a difficult position each year resulting from a myriad of institutional, economic, and political factors. Given the Commonwealth's propensity for budgetary gridlock, what is a possible solution for its budget woes?

### The Solution: Elect More Women

In American politics, "compromise is difficult, but governing a democracy without compromise is impossible" (Gutmann and Thompson 2012, 1). The American public views compromise as a normatively desirable feature of the policymaking process (Gutmann and Thompson 2012). A budget is a manifestation of politics that inherently leaves the political actors unsatisfied with the outcome. Because particularistic demand exceeds the supply of state fiscal

resources, the passage of a state's budget requires compromise by these political actors. Given this necessary condition, who better to serve than women who are viewed by society as natural compromisers (Fox and Oxley 2003)?

Gender stereotypes result from the understanding that differences between men and women result from patterns of socialization and normative gender structures rather than biological imperatives (Diekmann, Eagly, and Kulesa 2002). Men and women behave differently in social situations and take on different roles due to the expectations that society places upon them (Eagly 1987), with society establishing the judgment that men should occupy the public sphere of politics and be the breadwinners, while women should occupy the private sphere of the home and be the caregivers. As such, when women cross from the private into the public sphere, beliefs about gender differences tend to accompany them, stereotypically characterizing them as being more compassionate, collegial, and compromising (Prentice and Carranza 2002). Female politicians internalize these expectations and are socially rewarded for having these stereotypical traits (Eagly and Karau 2002). Surveys of female political officeholders show they believe they possess these interpersonal skills, making them more understanding and better at compromising than men (Johnson and Carroll 1978). They highlight their domestically honed diplomatic skills based on "mutual respect, consensus decision-making, validation of the feelings of others, and noncompetitive power" (Flammang 1985, 111). These expectations further shape the policy issues they are concerned with, with women more frequently addressing traditional "women's issues" (Holman 2014). Ultimately, because of gendered socialization patterns, these shared traits and interests yield a group of lawmakers who are more inclined to collaborate with each other and with others in their institutions.

A wide range of behavioral gender differences thus emerges (Eagly and Karau 2002). Female politicians report spending more time working to build relationships within their party and across party lines and engaging in more activities that involve communication and compromise (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998). Women adopt a more hands-on approach which emphasizes collegiality and cooperation (Jewell and Whicker 1994). Further, female politicians possess distinctive management or leadership styles with an insistence on mutual respect, consensus decision making, validation of the feelings of others, and noncompetitive power (Flammang 1985). Because of this, the inclusion of female politicians can change the agenda, process, and outcomes of the political institutions in which they are a part (Cammisa and Reingold 2004).

There is some reason to question the extent to which women *can* and *actually do* engage in this behavior. Collaboration and compromise can be

costly (Kanthak and Krause 2011). As the number of women holding office increases, these members may be less successful in achieving their goals (Carroll 2001), often facing increased resistance from their male colleagues (Kathlene 1994) and even backlash (Yoder 1991). Additionally, the influence and power of institutional masculine norms is thought to be more or less severe depending on the proportion of men and women in that body (Reingold 2003). In Congress, Lawless, Theriault, and Guthrie (2018) find the expectation of collaboration and compromise was mainly based on anecdotal evidence.

Yet Reingold (2003) finds that women who have made it into political office have broken formidable barriers and thus are capable of resisting and overcoming at least some constraints. While there is widespread agreement that women have been excluded from the “inner circles of power” (Mezey 1980, 184–185), there is less consensus on the degree to which such obstacles constrain their behavior (Gertzog 1984). As noted above, external pressures compel and reward women for living gendered stereotypes and behavioral expectations (Bauer, Harbridge, and Krupnikov 2017). Simply put, women who are expected to be more compromising than their male colleagues can face more punitive costs when they do not meet those expectations. Thus, to compensate for a lack of other means of accessing power, women work with each other to overcome structural and political barriers (Wojcik and Mullenax 2017).

As such, there is potential to observe the benefits of the tendency of women to reach across the aisle and collaborate. Journalists, pundits, politicians, and scholars have called for a greater presence of female lawmakers to reduce gridlock and counteract the rise in ideological polarization (Jackman 2013).

### Motivation to Compromise Resulting from Budget Impasses

Beyond merely necessitating compromise, failure to pass a budget by the fiscal year deadline has real consequences. It can result in the state incurring a variety of monetary costs. Legislatures that must extend the regular session or call special sessions to complete the budget process face increased operational costs (Pulsipher 2004). Additionally, during an impasse a state is unable to authorize payments into the next fiscal year and is subject to late fees and other penalties from vendors under state contract (Niquette 2009). Further, consistently failing to pass a budget in a timely manner can affect a state’s credit rating, decreasing bond ratings and increasing interest rates paid by states (Pulsipher 2004).

The state government does not solely incur the costs of a late budget. Without appropriation details, local governments, school districts, and non-profit organizations are unable to budget, plan, or deal effectively with their

contractual obligations (Pulsipher 2004). In 2009 and 2015, numerous Pennsylvania nonprofit groups like domestic violence shelters were compelled to furlough, reduce hours, eliminate benefits, and lay off portions of their labor force. County child protection service agencies were unable to place at-risk children in protective care without state funds (Wetzel 2009). When a state fails to pass its budget on time, people dependent on local social welfare programs, businesses that have contracts with the state, residents expecting a state income-tax refund, and college students expecting state grants are all left waiting until a new budget is enacted (Sweeney 2009). Additionally, school districts, which need a budget in place to receive funding, have made employees work without pay, considered moving to a four-day schedule, took out short-term loans, or threatened to shut their doors completely (Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association 2015).

Beyond the significant monetary costs to the states, it is these wider social costs that should drive female lawmakers to engage in consensus-oriented behavior during budgetary negotiations and avoid lengthy impasse periods. As the duration of a budget impasse increases, these populations of both descriptive and policy importance to female lawmakers are disproportionately harmed (Responsible Budget Coalition 2016). These constituent groups have become political bargaining chips in contemporary budget negotiations, as programs on which these groups rely are regularly impacted. This point was articulated by Governor Wolf who stated “I don’t want to hold the children of Pennsylvania hostage because of the inability of people in Harrisburg to get the job done” (Lindstrom and Gilliland 2015), and that failure to swiftly pass a balanced budget results in “consequences that will be forced upon the Commonwealth [which] will be unfortunate and could include impacts to programs on which our constituents rely” (Navratil 2017).

### Evidence of Compromise

There is precedent to expect that electing women will make the budgetary process more collegial and could reduce the duration of an impasse should one occur. During the 2013 federal government shutdown, a bipartisan group of female U.S. senators held a weekend meeting beyond the eyes and influence of their party leadership and discussed ways to reopen the government (Weisman and Steinhauer 2013). Their male colleagues credited these discussions with shaping the compromise ending the budget impasse (Bassett 2013). Interviews with female members of Congress ultimately reveal that they see collaboration and collegiality as their greatest strengths (Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll 2018).

Similarly, in 2018 Louisiana was headed toward a \$650 million shortfall at the end of the fiscal year and was at the end of its second special session attempting to address this problem. It was only because of the failed effort of Representative Julie Stokes (R), who was stopped at the microphone by a male colleague from calling for a compromise vote earlier in June, and the eventual success of Representative Paula Davis's (R) compromise bill, that the budget stalemate was broken (Poche and Sanders 2018). In a legislature composed of only 15% women, the efforts of these women and their other female colleagues were instrumental in reaching a compromise.

Specifically concerning Pennsylvania, a report by the Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics (2017) revealed that during the 2015 budget impasse, many women in the legislature on both sides of the aisle gathered for coffee and discussed efforts to end the impasse. This report details that in interviews with many female lawmakers, they espoused that the female lawmakers were more cooperative, especially during increasingly divided times (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics 2017; Sweet-Cushman 2020). The substance of these interviews is consistent with gender socialization patterns, indicating that these lawmakers possess the stereotypical shared traits and interests that make them more inclined to collaborate. Considering these shared traits, many of the women felt that they were more cooperative because women worked differently. Senator Judy Schwank (D) and Representative Margo Davidson (D) noted that women legislate differently, seeking out likeminded legislators with whom to collaborate. Similar to the domestically honed diplomatic skills noted by Flammang (1985), Representative Tina Picket (R) felt that a woman's ability to multitask was comparable to how they juggle various household demands. Despite not having a formal women's caucus, Representative Davidson noted that they have an informal pact to support each other's policy efforts. Together, in today's partisan environment, many female lawmakers expressed the necessity of cooperation.

Further, women share common interests, with Representative Donna Oberlander (R) noting that they naturally collaborate with one another because they share common ground. Women in the legislature focus on addressing traditional "women's issues" which affect key demographics such as women, children, and families. Representative Mauree Gingrich (R) noted that women needed to tackle these issues because if they didn't, no one else would. Representative Davidson felt that solidarity among women, regardless of party, was important because it facilitated greater progress on these key issues. Ultimately, Representative Mary Jo Daley (D) expressed that compromising was crucial because it allowed for dialogue on these issues (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics 2017; Sweet-Cushman 2020).

Taken together, this anecdotal and qualitative evidence is illustrative of the premise that women possess both the means and motivation to engage in collaborative efforts. Yet, given current representation levels, electoral and partisan demands, and institutional norms, observing collaboration in the passage of a timely budget might not yet be realized. The evidence cited earlier indicates that the optimal time to observe potential collaboration is once the fiscal year ends without a new budget in place and the state enters into a period of budget impasse (a late budget). This is especially true when impasses stretch on, acutely impacting many of the groups and issues traditionally designated as “woman oriented” (Responsible Budget Coalition 2016).

But evidence beyond anecdotal and qualitative accounts is necessary to determine if electing more women to the General Assembly can solve Pennsylvania’s budget woes by making the budgetary process more collegial. Comparative empirical evidence can offer further support for this behavior during periods of budget impasse. I thus examine the duration of budget impasses in the American states from 1993 to 2006 taken from Kousser and Phillips (2012). Within this period there were 71 late budgets and impasses lasted an average of 47.7 days in 18 states. The influence of gender on the length of an impasse manifests in both the presence of women within the legislature overall—% Legislature Female (–)—and within the political minority—% Legislature Minority Female (–)—coded as the percentage of the state legislature/minority party represented by women and taken from data collected by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP).<sup>2</sup>

Beyond these key variables of interest, several additional factors were considered. While it is one thing for a woman to be elected, it is another thing to be a power player or critical actor (Childs and Krook 2009). As such, leadership positions within the legislative party structure—% Party Leadership Female (–)—are coded as the percentage of the party leadership positions held by women and taken from data collected by the CAWP. Partisanship and polarization should make it more difficult to bring an impasse to conclusion. Under divided government, stalemates occur because the two branches cannot agree on the distribution of particularistic and statewide spending (Barrilleaux and Berkman 2003). Thus, Divided Government (+) is coded 1 when both branches of the state government are divided along partisan lines, 0 otherwise (Klarner 2013). Similarly, the ideological Polarization (+) of the legislature will make resolution more difficult. Taken from Birkhead (2016), this measure is operationalized from the Shor-McCarty common space scores (Shor and McCarty 2011) as a single-dimension indicator, with higher values indicating more polarized parties. Additionally, increases in legislative professionalization (Squire 2007) afford members a greater degree of patience in

protracted budget deliberations (Kousser and Phillips 2009). Taken from *The Book of the States*, the number of Days in Session (+) a state legislature meets provides an accurate reflection of their level of patience in a budget impasse period (Kousser and Phillips 2009).

Finally, several fiscal and institutional features may impact budget resolution during an impasse. A highly complex budget can make the process more difficult (Klarner, Phillips, and Muckler 2012). The state's total Real General Expenditures (+) in a given year, and whether the state operates under a Biennial budget (+), coded 1 if the state budgets biennially and 0 otherwise, both increase the complexity of the budget. Data for both variables were taken from *The Book of the States*. Similarly, the fiscal health of the state can influence the passage of a state's budget (Klarner, Phillips, and Muckler 2012). The state's budget Surplus (-), measured as the difference between total expenditures and revenues with negative values indicating a budget deficit and lagged one period ( $t-1$ ) and taken from Klarner, Phillips, and Muckler (2012), and the state's Unemployment rate (-), taken from the Bureau of Economic Analysis's Local Area Unemployment Statistics, seasonally adjusted, were included. Whether the state requires a partial government Shutdown (-) in the absence of a budget is included, coded 1 if the state's law mandates a government shutdown and 0 otherwise and was taken from Andersen, Lassen, and Nielsen (2012).

I fit a Cox proportional hazards model to consider the factors that influence the duration of a budget impasse, with failure specified as when a state adopts its budget for the next fiscal year bringing the budget impasse to an end. The results from this analysis are displayed in Table 1.

Hazard ratios are reported allowing for ease of interpretation: values greater than 1 imply the hazard rate is increasing such that the presence of the indicator increases the probability that the budget impasse will come to an end, while values less than 1 imply the opposite. Briefly turning to the ancillary covariates of interest, various significant factors explain the duration of a budget impasse consistent with the prior literature (*Polarization*, *Days in Session*, and *Surplus*), whereas other covariates revealed effects consistent with expectations though failing to reach accepted levels of significance (*Divided Government*, *Real General Expenditures*, *Unemployment*, and *Biennial*). The only significant result inconsistent with expectations was that having a greater presence of women in the party leadership (*% Party Leadership Female*) increased the length of a budget impasse, increasing the hazard rate by 2.4%. But this finding is not entirely surprising given that gender roles persist in historically male-dominated institutions where women who seek leadership positions must sacrifice much of who they are to overcome many of

Table 1. Factors Affecting Duration of Budget Impasses, 1993–2006	
% Legislature Female	1.076* (0.042)
% Legislature Minority Female	1.083** (0.041)
% Party Leadership Female	0.976* (0.013)
Divided Government	0.733 (0.279)
Polarization	0.858 <sup>†</sup> (0.082)
Days in Session	0.991*** (0.003)
Real General Expenditures	0.977 (0.048)
Unemployment	0.975 (0.116)
Surplus	1.036*** (0.013)
Shutdown	0.457 (0.236)
Biennial	0.322*** (0.133)
<i>N</i>	71
<i>Notes:</i> Estimates for Cox proportional hazards survival analysis. Failure = when a state adopts its budget for the next fiscal year bringing the budget impasse to an end. Coefficients are hazard ratios, followed by standard errors in parentheses. * $p \leq .10$ ; ** $p \leq .05$ ; *** $p \leq .01$ ; <sup>†</sup> significant at the 0.10 level (one-tailed test)	

the obstacles faced by their predecessors (Campbell and Jerry 1988; Marshall and Mayhead 2000).

Turning to the role that gender can play during a budget stalemate, consistent with expectations, the presence of women in the legislature has a significant impact of shortening a budget impasse, should one occur. In the legislature overall (*% Legislature Female*), each additional percent of the legislature represented by women increases the likelihood of an impasse coming to an end by 7.6%. Substantively, a 1 standard deviation increase in the percentage of women in the legislature is associated with a 32.6% decrease in the duration of a budget impasse.<sup>3</sup> Further, when a larger number of women are in the political minority (*% Legislature Minority Female*), a similar effect is observed, with an increase in their presence increasing the risk of an impasse ending by 8.3%, and substantively experiencing a 28.3% decrease in the duration of a budget impasse. Taken together, irrespective of where women exist in the legislature (overall or in the political minority), once a budget impasse does occur, an increased female presence benefits the state in reducing the length of the duration.

Considered with the above evidence that women in the Pennsylvania General Assembly possess the means and motivation to work collaboratively, an increased presence of women has the potential to positively influence this inherently conflictual process. Pennsylvania thus sits at a crossroads in

its history, faced with a great opportunity to limit its perennial budgeting problems.

## Problems and Possibilities

### The Problem

Women have been significantly underrepresented at every level of government throughout Pennsylvania's history. To date, Pennsylvania has never had a female governor, and even though the number of women in the General Assembly has quintupled since 1975, in 2018 Pennsylvania was ranked 39th in the country for the overall proportion of legislative seats held by women (Center for American Women and Politics 2018).

The slow movement of women into political office has been taken as *prima facie* evidence that voters are biased against female candidates. However, recent literature on sex-based discrimination offers an optimistic outlook such that voters do not appear to factor a candidate's sex into their decision-making calculus, with women winning at comparable rates to men (Brooks 2013). The pattern of women remaining vastly underrepresented in elected office is attributed more to women being more averse to seeking office, either because they do not consider themselves qualified (Kanthak and Woon 2015) or because few people encourage them to run (Lawless and Fox 2010). Even if a gender bias exists, increased representation over time has normalized the image of women as viable candidates in the mind of the electorate.

2018 saw a record number of women expressing interest in and running for elected office, spurring hopes that 2018 could become a new "Year of the Woman." More women ran for state governor than in the last seven years combined, and record numbers of women ran for their state's legislature. In Pennsylvania, 126 women ran as major-party candidates for state legislative office (88 Democrats and 38 Republicans) and Laura Ellsworth ran for the Republican nomination to challenge incumbent governor Tom Wolf. Given the historic number of women running across all levels of government, numerous polls showed a shift in attitudes toward support for having women in elected office, though with some mixed findings in attitudes toward the benefits of women on the government (Igielnik and Horowitz 2018).

### Possibilities and Challenges

As a result of the 2018 midterm elections, the number of women in the Pennsylvania legislature has improved, with 12 women in the state Senate (up from seven) and 51 in the state House (up from 42). While these numbers are an

improvement, Pennsylvania only increased its rank from 39th in the country to 34th (Center for American Women and Politics 2019). Despite becoming more diverse, it remains substantially unrepresentative of the female population (24.9% compared to 51%). But at what level of representation would the benefits of gender on the budgetary process be realized?

Much of the prior research focuses on the concept of *critical mass*: as the number of women grows from a few token members to a certain threshold it can shape the process and policies of that political body. This theory assumes a linear relationship between the number of women and the desired political outcomes. Various thresholds have been proposed to operationalize this relationship, commonly categorized as *skewed groups* (up to 15%), *titled groups* (15–35%) (Kanter 1977), and the widely used critical cut-point of 30% (Dahlerup 1988). Others argue that as the number of women in an organization increases, the women will be less successful in achieving their policy goals (Carroll 2001), often facing resistance from their male colleagues (Kathlene 1994). As such, women might be more effective in the political minority (Osborn 2014), as they would be in a position in which they must reach across party lines to advance their goals (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). Pennsylvania is in a unique position to evaluate the impact of increased women's representation. Increased representation inches the legislature closer to the 30% cut-point, allowing for evaluation of critical mass theories. Further, the recent increases have occurred in the Democratic political minority, a position necessitating compromise, allowing for evaluation of theories of minority representation.

Despite increases in women's representation, it may take time for Pennsylvania to realize these benefits. Critics argue that studies of substantive representation perhaps should focus not on what women do but rather on what *specific actors* do (Childs and Krook 2009). Critical Actor Theory suggests that it takes time for women to gain seniority and assume positions of power in the party leadership and chamber committees. Since 1945, only 10 women in the House and 1 in the Senate have ever held leadership positions (Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics 2019), and no woman has ever held a top leadership post (e.g., president pro tempore/speaker). Similarly, while the number of women holding committee chairs has increased overtime, of the 94 possible positions, women have only recently held 11 (8 Senate/3 House) (Center for American Women and Politics 2017), and no woman has ever led the Appropriations Committee in either chamber (Pennsylvania General Assembly 2019).

This underrepresentation highlights the fact that women entering into the legislature face an institutional culture that upholds masculinity as the

norm (Thomas 1994). But this is not unique to Pennsylvania, as the political world has traditionally been “a man’s business” (Githens and Prestage 1977, 339), given that there has never been majority female legislative body in the United States. Nevada recently made history by becoming the first state in which women hold a majority of the seats in the state legislature. Though still early in the new legislative session, members acknowledge that the institution is already experiencing a culture change, advancing a significant number of bills dealing with traditional women’s issues, which state Senator Spearman (D) noted in prior legislative sessions “the boys club was like, ‘why do we need that,’” yet are now receiving significant attention and support. Ultimately, “there’s change in this building that is just this amazing story of transformation . . . and it really highlights the importance of the female majority being not just here, but finally being heard,” said Senator Swank (D) (Wax-Thibodeaux 2019). With significant gains being made by women in legislatures across the country, and with women holding more than 40 percent of seats in Nevada, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington, scholars’ ability to observe potential institutional change may be on the horizon.

This change may not come fast enough for Pennsylvania given that the Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) projected that, because the 2015 budget impasse fought over tax increases was ended by meeting shortfalls with transfers from other state accounts totaling more than \$1 billion, budget shortfalls are expected to reoccur every year until fiscal year 2023–2024 (Esack 2018). Fiscal year 2020 began with an expected \$1.7 billion deficit whereas the ongoing impact and uncertainty caused by COVID-19 resulted in fiscal year 2021 opening with a \$3.2 billion shortfall. These deficits necessitate the Commonwealth to take a long look at increasing income or sales taxes or reducing certain state services. Additionally, the recent Democratic electoral success saw the defeat of many moderate Republicans from the Philadelphia suburbs, making the ideological distribution of the Republican majorities more conservative. Taken together, Pennsylvania is set up to experience additional budget fights for the foreseeable future.

However, the future is bright for Democratic women moving forward. While the Republican party has consistently held an advantage in the number of women in the General Assembly historically, the results of the 2018 elections have altered this trend. Female candidates in Pennsylvania can overcome the challenges in candidate recruitment (see Brown, this volume) and emerge as quality contenders for both open-seat contests and against entrenched incumbents. Pennsylvania is at a historic crossroads, and how it proceeds moving forward will have important implications for the growth and prosperity of the Commonwealth.

## NOTES

1. Polarization is defined as the average ideological distance between the median Democrat and Republican in the state legislature and taken from Shor and McCarty (2011).

2. The parenthesis following each covariate reflects the direction of the hypothesized relationship: a (+) indicates that it is expected that the variable increases the duration of the impasse whereas a (-) indicates a shorter impasse.

3. Increasing the value of % *Legislature Female* by 1 standard deviation centered on the mean, calculated using the unexponentiated coefficient 0.072 or  $\ln(1.075)$  and the expression:  $\exp(0.072 \times 18.87) - \exp(0.072 \times 24.65) / \exp(0.072 \times 24.65) \times 100$ . This same formula was subsequently adjusted for % *Legislature Minority Female*.

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