

# Responding to Insults: Woman and Minority Congressional Lawmakers Creating Productive Politics From a Hostile Climate

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## Research Question

In what ways are women and minority elected officials, both the newly elected and long-standing office holders and members of their support staff, responding to current partisan conflict and pointed uncivil and disrespectful attacks as they seek to perform their work as public servants representing their constituents and the public at large?

## Methods

The methods in this study are shaped in part by an exciting opportunity to serve as an intern in the Office of the Speaker Nancy Pelosi in Washington, D.C. during fall 2019. The methods of investigation were a combination of qualitative research methods, including interviews with women and minority lawmakers and staff members on Capitol Hill, participant observations in Congressional hearings and daily operations, and archival research on relevant political speech and activity. I coded the data by placing it into different topics based on stereotypes used and behavioral expectations that were expressed or implied. I used this information to analyze the differing discourse, bias(es), and response type. Additionally, I color coded different themes and commonalities, terms, phrases, ideas, etc.

## Findings

- Preferred responses: Based in fact, civil, relatable (through humor and storytelling).
  - Responses need to be balanced between both acknowledging stereotypes in the workplace, and attempting to break from them.
- Implicit bias: attacks are influenced by, and possibly formed from, implicit biases originating in gender and racial stereotypes.
- Political aggression and incivility is a long-term trend, but recently has been driven by the language of President Trump.
- Uncivil discourse acts as an obstacle to passing legislation in Congress.

The techniques offered by the respondents are proving to be the most successful in addressing and dismantling stereotypical behavioral expectations of racial, ethnic, religious, and gender minorities in the political sphere. Most notably, the data collected may offer a roadmap forward towards political civility, effective governance, and appreciation of diversity in American politics.