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The Effect of Socioeconomic Status on the Number of Women in State Legislatures

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Abstract

Women legislators in the United States are more likely than their male counterparts to include legislation concerning women, children, and families among their top priorities (Thomas 1991; Reingold 1992; Swers 1998). Additionally, women are more successful in their efforts to pass these bills into law. These findings have important implications because they suggest that states with more female legislators will have more bills introduced and passed concerning traditional women's issues. Yet there is a wide range in the number of women serving in legislatures, with a high of 37.2% in Vermont and a low of 8.8% in South Carolina. So the question remains, what causes this variation among states?

To answer this question, I used data collected by the Institute for Women's Policy Research concerning the socioeconomic status of women in each state. By running a multivariate regression using this data and the number of women in a state legislature, I was able to test whether the status of women has an effect on the number of women in the legislature. Additionally, I ran models including the number of women in leadership positions and the number of Democratic and Republican members of legislatures to test the effect of the status of women on these variables. The theory behind the tests is that a higher socioeconomic status of women in the electorate creates a larger candidate pool for women. Overall, the results suggest that the socioeconomic status of women does have an influence on the number of women in a state legislature. I conclude that increasing women's socioeconomic status, particularly the level of education, will help to increase the amount of women in legislatures.

Existing Literature

For those who study the policy impact of women in legislatures, an important question is whether the election of women leads to legislation concerned with women's interests (Pitkin 1967). Much work has been done on this topic and the answer to this question has evolved as the number of women in both state legislatures and Congress has increased.

When scholars first began delving into this area of study in the 1960s, the focus was primarily on state legislatures because this was the area of government where women had the most representation–substantially more women served in state legislatures than in Congress. Research found that while women had different attitudes about women's issues than men, this did not spillover into their policy priorities. Scholarship by Diamond (1977) and others suggested that female state legislators expressed more liberal attitudes than men on feminist issues such as support for the Equal Rights Amendment, public funding of day care, and abortion rights (Diamond 1977; Johnson et al. 1978). These attitudes did not however translate into higher policy priorities. When asked to rank their policy priorities, the priorities of female legislators did not differ significantly from their male counterparts (Mezey 1978; Thomas 1994). Additionally, during the 1970s women legislators devoted more time to constituency service and less on speaking in committee and on the floor, working with colleagues and bargaining with lobbyists; these are all activities associated with pushing a policy agenda (Kirkpatrick 1974; Diamond 1977; Thomas 1994).

Flammang's 1985 study of county supervisors in Santa Clara, California argues that the presence of supportive colleagues allowed women to speak out and participate in the legislative process. In this female conscious environment, Flammang (1985) finds that a range of views on women's roles are expressed by the women in office. More interesting was the idea of women's "traditional" activities as providing a unique contribution to politics. Yet Flammang still finds few policy differences between male and female officials.

It is not until Thomas's seminal work in 1991 on women in state legislatures that a new theory on women's impact on policy is created. Thomas (1991) argues that the slow acceptance of women into the political arena intimidated women from pushing their more liberal policy initiatives. Building upon past research in the field and her own studies, Thomas (1991) did a comprehensive study of sex differences in legislative behavior across 12 state legislatures. She looked specifically at gender differences in types of

bills among women's and men's top legislative priorities and gender differences in levels of success in passing priority bills dealing with issues of women, children, and the family. Her study finds that women were more likely than their male counterparts to include legislation concerning women, children, and families among their top priorities, and they were more successful in their efforts to pass these bills into law. Men on the other hand, much more than women, place priority on business and economic legislation (Thomas and Welch 1991). Thomas (1991) also finds that not only does increased representation affect whether or not women will pursue a given issue, women appear to be more likely to introduce and pass legislation concerning traditional women's issues in situations in which they may find support. This finding follows with Flammang's (1985) study and her argument that a supportive atmosphere is more conducive to women officeholders speaking out.

Thomas's work is particularly important because her findings contradict prior research, which suggests that even though women had different attitudes about women's issues than men, this did not spillover into their policy priorities. A probable explanation for this is the increase in number of women in politics. Flammang (1985) and Thomas (1991) both argue that women were less likely to push for their legislative priorities and initiatives because of the lack of support and number of women in politics at the time. As the number of women increase in politics, it can be argued that women will feel more comfortable and confident in pursuing their legislative goals (Flammang 1985; Thomas 1991).

The idea that women are more likely to initiate legislation concerned with traditional women's issues has been studied further by several scholars. In multistate analyses and longitudinal studies of single legislatures, scholars have found that in comparison to men, female legislators are more liberal in their policy attitudes and they illustrate a greater commitment to the pursuit of feminist initiatives and legislation (Saint-Germain 1989; Dodson and Carroll 1991; Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Thomas 1994; Dolan and Ford 1995). Additionally, a woman legislator is more likely to see her women's issue proposal passed into law than a man (Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1994). Interestingly, scholars have found that women expressed a sense of responsibility to represent the interests of women (Reingold 1992; Thomas 1994, 1997).

Research on African American women finds similar results. Barrett (1995) argues that black women are similar to non-black women in their strong support for pro-women's policy issues. Yet she suggests that African

American women are even stronger in their consensus that education, health care, economic development, and employment are their top priorities (Barrett 1995).

Kathlene (2005) takes this research further by exploring the roots of women's distinctive legislative attitudes and behaviors. She finds that both individuals and institutions are influenced by gender and that expectations of proper behavior for each sex affect individual choices and legislative rules (Kathlene 2005). Building on Gilligan's (1982) work studying gender differences in moral decision making, Kathlene (1995) finds that women and men state legislators view crime and prison issues in very different ways. Women legislators tend to emphasize the societal link to crime and view crime as part of a lifelong issue stemming from childhood experiences, poor education, and lack of opportunities. Men, on the other hand, emphasize individual responsibility. This different approach to the issue results in different policy proposals. Women propose legislation that is contextual, multifaceted, and long-term, and men tend to propose stricter sentencing and increased prison space (Kathlene 1995).

Several studies find differences in the leadership style of men and women. These studies argue that women adopt more egalitarian leadership styles that value consensus and collaboration, whereas men adopt more authoritative styles that emphasize competition and conflict (Kathlene 1995; Thomas 1994; Reingold 2000).

Much less work has been done on women in Congress because until recently there have been far fewer Congresswomen to observe. Currently 16.1% of United States Senators are female while women represent 16.3% of the House of Representatives (CAWP 2007). The first efforts to study whether women in Congress had an impact on legislation focused on roll-call voting behavior (Gehlen 1977; Leader 1977; Frankovic 1977). As the study of women in Congress has matured the results have been mixed. Some researchers have found that gender does play a role in voting on specific women's issues such as abortion (Tatalovich and Schier 1993) and other women's issues (Burrell 1994; Dolan 1997; Swers 1998). Beyond roll-call voting behavior, Congresswomen are sponsoring and co-sponsoring more legislation concerning women's issues (Swers 2000; Tamerius 1995; Vega and Firestone 1995). Female legislators also demonstrate higher rates of participation in floor debates on women's issues (Tamerius 1995; Swers 2000).

Socioeconomic Status and Women in State Legislatures

Women in State Legislatures

With the number of women serving in state legislatures quintupling since 1971, research reveals that women now engage in the full range of legislative actions in equal or nearly equal levels to men (Thomas and Welch 1991). Currently, 23.5% of state legislators are women (CAWP 2007). Yet there is a wide range between states in the number of women legislators with a high of 37.2% in Vermont and a low of 8.8% in South Carolina. Knowing that women tend to represent women's issues while in office, it can be argued that, in states with higher levels of female representation, the amount and type of representation is likely to be different compared to states with fewer women.

So the question remains, what causes this range in the number of women in state legislatures? Much research has been done on why women are being kept out of office across the country. Researchers argue that factors such as incumbency, low turnover rates, careerism, political ambition, and opportunity all play a role in whether women are elected to office (Burrell 1994; Carroll 1994; Palmer and Simon 2006). But why do some states elect a high percentage of women (relative to the total number of women in office) to their state legislature and some a very low percentage? One possible answer is that the pool of women that are likely to run for office is different from state to state. Many researchers point to the "eligibility pool" to explain the low number of women candidates and elected officials (Conway, Steurnagle and Ahern 1997; Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994; Duerst-Lahti 1998; Thomas 1998). Simply too few women occupy high-level positions in the professions that serve as pipelines to careers in politics (Clark 1994). Additionally, states vary in the number of women who possess the skills normally associated with running for public office, such as college degrees and employment in professional occupations. Although many women with nontraditional backgrounds seek and win state legislative office, states with higher levels of women in the labor force and in professional occupations have a larger potential pool of candidates (Rule 1981; Welch 1985; Nechemias 1987; Burrell 1994; Norrander and Clyde 2005).

Despite these findings, Fox and Lawless (2004) find that women who share the same personal characteristics and professional credentials as men express significantly lower levels of political ambition to hold elective office. They offer two explanations for these findings; first, women are far less likely than men to be encouraged to run for office, and second, women are significantly less likely than men to view themselves as qualified to run (Fox and Lawless 2004).

Adding to this research, Sanbonmatsu (2002) argues that factors that are expected to increase women's opportunities may not equally benefit women from both political parties. In her 2002 book, Sanbonmatsu suggests that aspects of the political opportunity structure facing women candidates are specific to each party and that because the parties can be conceptualized as two different social groups, including different subgroups of women, the pool of eligible women candidates interacts with party. Additionally, Fiorina (1994) argues that differences in the attitudes and demographic backgrounds of Democrats and Republicans are likely to affect their incentives to run for office. It is widely known that more female state legislators are Democrats, and although women have been increasing their numbers as a proportion of all Democrats elected to state legislative office, the number of Republican women winning seats as a proportion of all Republicans has remained stagnant or declined (Carroll 2002; Dolan 2004; Norrander and Wilcox 2005; Palmer and Simon 2006).

Using data collected by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, I examine the question of whether the status of women in a state has an effect on the number of women elected to office in that state. Specifically, I analyze the socioeconomic status of the pool of potential candidates in a state and its effect on the number of women in the state legislature.

Significance of Research

Addressing the question of whether the status of women has an effect on the percentage of women in state legislature is important for several reasons, particularly because it seeks to explain why women have more representation in some states than in others. When Thomas (1991) published her work on women in state legislatures it was a breakthrough in the study of women legislators' impact on state policy because it was a split from the research of the 1970s that suggested the policy priorities of men and women had little variation. We now know that women have unique legislative priorities, including a concern for women's issues. This finding changed the study of women and politics and opened up the field of research in this area.

Caiazza (2004) looks at the influence of women elected officials on women-friendly policy. Specifically, she measures whether women's representation to policymaking depends in part on context. She argues that the right political culture–including both party and attitudes toward women in office–plays an important role both in advancing policy when women are in office and in women winning office in the first place. Additionally, she suggests

that public support for women's political participation (which itself suggests a certain level of support for women's equality overall) helps put more women in office, and Democratic dominance of the state legislature increases women's ability to advance a women-friendly agenda.

The question I wish to address with this paper is important because it builds upon the research of Caiazza (2004) and others by assessing why some states are more likely to elect women than others. While Caiazza and I use some similar variables (women voter turnout and women in the labor force), she uses them to assess their effect on women-friendly policies. I am using them to measure their effect on the number of women in state legislatures. Many researchers have looked at the roadblocks women face when they are considering running for office and what factors create this political glass ceiling. My research is important because it helps to explain what those roadblocks may be and why some states are more prone to elect women to their legislatures.

Using state data from the Institute for Women's Policy Research as a way to determine the status of women, I will examine the relationship, if any, between this data and the percentage of women in the legislature. If there is in fact a relationship between the percentage of women in the legislature and the status of women, this would indicate that women are more likely to be elected in states where females have a "higher" status and therefore a larger potential candidate pool.

If a significant relationship is not found, there is still something to be learned from these findings. This would suggest that even though there are an increased number of women in a legislature and potentially more legislation concerning women's issues being passed, this does not mean the potential candidate pool for women is larger. There are of course several factors that could be present in this situation that are affecting the election of women to office including incumbency, turnover rates, and the party in control of government.

This research is particularly critical because it seeks to explain why women have more representation in some states than in others. These differences have important implications, as research has shown that women lawmakers work and vote differently than men and have different policy priorities. This adds to past research that suggests that women are including feminist issues as their legislative priorities and explains why this influence may not be consistent from state to state.

Methodology

To assess the possible factors that may lead to a higher or lower percentage of women in state legislatures, I use multivariate regression. This statistical procedure allows me to look at multiple potential causes for the variation in the number of women legislators across the states. I used a level of significance to interpret the importance of each independent variable and employed the standard rule which reports significance as coefficients that have less than a 5% (** = p < .05) or a 1% (*** = p < .01) chance of being no different from 0.

In an effort to find the most accurate results, I ran three models with different dependent variables. The first model used the total percentage of women that are in each state legislature as of 2007. The second model used the percentage of leadership positions[19] that are held by women in each state legislature as of 2005. I used data collected by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University for both of these variables. CAWP keeps an up-to-date database of the number of women in state legislatures and Congress. By looking at both the total percentage of women in the legislature and the percentage of women in leadership positions, I was able to determine if increasing the potential candidate pool not only increases the number of women in the legislature but also the number of women in leadership positions. Finally I ran models using political party (Democrat and Republican) as the dependent variable. By looking at political party, I was able to determine if having a larger pool of women has an effect on the party in power of the legislature and whether certain socioeconomic traits favor one party over another. I collected this information on the 2007 state legislatures from the National Conference on State Legislatures, which maintains an up-to-date database on the party and members of each state legislature. Looking at political parties allowed me to explore whether women of a higher socioeconomic status influence the party in power in state legislatures.

To measure the status of women in each state, I used data collected by the Institute for Women's Policy Research in their 2004 *The Status of Women in the States* publication. *The Status of Women in the States* reports are produced to inform citizens about the progress of women in other states, compared to men, and to the nation as a whole. I chose independent variables that could be used to determine if the quality of life for women has increased. These variables included: the average total percentage of women

[19] Leadership positions include committee chairs.

who voted in 1998 and 2000; the earnings ratio between full-time, year-round employed women and men, 2002; percentage of women in the labor force, 2002; percentage of women with health care, 2002; percentage of college educated women, 2000; percentage of women owned businesses, 1997; and percentage of women above poverty, 2002. The Institute for Women's Policy Research used several sources to collect their data, including: the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 2000 and 2002, the Urban Institute 2004, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation 2004, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2004.

I picked these independent variables because they are representative of the characteristics of a potential political candidate. Generally speaking potential candidates possess a college degree and have some professional experience. By looking at educations and various labor and wage statistics, we can determine what states have women with a greater status and therefore more potential to run for office.

Analysis and Discussion

The results reported in table 1 indicate a strong relationship between the status of women and the number of women legislators in a state. In the first model, with the percentage of the women in state legislature as the dependent variable, six of the seven independent variables are significant. Holding all other variables constant, the percentage of women in the labor force, the male to female wage ratio, the percentage of women who are college educated, and the percentage of women who own businesses all produced significant positive results. Specifically, an increase of one percentage point in women in the labor force resulted in an increase in women in state legislature of 0.58 percentage points. A one-unit increase in the male to female wage ratio resulted in a 0.66 percentage point increase in women in legislature. A one percentage point increase in the percentage of women who are college educated resulted in a 0.63 percentage point increase in women in legislature. And finally, a one percentage point increase in women who own businesses resulted in a 1.24 percentage point increase in the total number of women in legislature.

Interestingly, percentage of women with health insurance and percentage of women above the poverty line resulted in a significant negative relationship with women in legislature. A one percentage point increase in women with health insurance resulted in a decrease in women in state legislature of 0.51 percentage points. A one percentage point increase in women above the poverty level resulted in a decrease in women in legislature of 0.19

percentage points. While women with health insurance and women above the poverty line certainly fall into the traditional potential candidate pool, overall these results reinforce the idea that states with a higher percentage of women that fall into the traditional potential candidate pool have more women elected to office.

The only variable that did not result in a significant relationship with the number of women in a legislature was the number of women who voted. This is a bit surprising because it is often thought that women are more likely to vote for women candidates than men voters (Dolan 1998). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the relationship between women in a legislature and women and voters is positive. Nonetheless, these results suggest that increasing the female candidate pool is more important than increasing female voters when trying to increase the overall total of women in legislature.

Table 1. The Significance of Women's Status on the Percentage of Women in State Legislature

	Number of Obs.			50
	F (7, 42)			9.03
	Prob. > F			0.00
	R-squared			0.61
	Adjusted R-squared			0.53
Percentage of Legislature Comprised of Women	**Coef.**	**Std. Err.**	**t**	**P > |t|**
Percentage of Women Who Voted	0.07	0.15	0.49	.63
% Women Labor	0.58	0.26	2.24	.03*
Wage Ratio	0.66	0.25	2.7	.01**
% Health Insurance	-0.51	0.21	-2.43	.02*
% College Education	0.63	0.24	2.6	.01**
% Women Business	1.24	0.47	2.65	.01**
% Women Poverty	-0.19	0.08	-2.24	.03*
Constant	-46.42	20.97	-2.21	.03

** = p <.05, ** = p <.01, *** = p < .001*

I ran two tests for multicollinearity to ensure that my independent variables did not have a significant relationship that could influence the results. Table 2 shows the results of a correlation matrix with none of the dependent variables reaching the 0.85 threshold for multicollinearity. I also tested the variance inflation factor (VIF) in table 3, which again showed that my regression test had low multicollinearity.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis of Variables

	Voted	*Labor*	*Wage Ratio*	*Health Insurance*	*College*	*Business*	*Poverty*
Women Voted	1						
Women Labor	0.57	1					
Wage Ratio	0.21	0.43	1				
Health Insurance	0.42	0.57	0.58	1			
College Education	0.19	0.53	0.33	0.36	1		
Women Business	-0.16	-0.04	-0.01	-0.02	0.42	1	
Women Poverty	0.32	0.37	0.21	0.28	0.22	-0.07	1

Table 3. Variance Inflation Factor Analysis

Variable	**VIF**	**1/VIF**
Women Labor	2.50	0.40
College Education	1.97	0.51
Health Insurance	1.91	0.52
Women Voted	1.62	0.62
Wage Ratio	1.57	0.64
Women Business	1.39	0.72
Women Poverty	1.20	0.83
Mean VIF	1.74	

The results in table 1 suggest that states with more women who are potential candidates elect more women to their state legislature. These

characteristics include higher education, employment in professional occupations and higher wages. These states simply have more women with the potential to not only have interest in but also actually be elected to office. Additionally, the presence of women lawmakers increases the interest of female citizens in politics (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). It could be argued that in a similar fashion that support helps to encourage women introduce legislation concerning women's issues while in office, and the support could also influence a women's decision to run for office. A woman who lives in a state where more women are represented in her state legislature may feel more comfortable running for office. Also, women also may be more likely to run for office in states where voters show less bias against women candidates or where gender roles are less traditional.

This is not to say that having a large or small pool of potential candidates is the only indicator of the number of women that get elected to office. There are several other possible explanations as to why women are kept out of office. These factors include the rate of turnover in the legislature and the difficulty of defeating incumbents.

Although socioeconomic factors such as education and profession clearly influence the number of women legislators, the next step is to see if these factors have an effect on the number of women in leadership positions.

Table 4 reveals that the percentage of women with a college education was the only variable which resulted in a significant relationship with the percentage of women in leadership positions. This reinforces the idea that educated women make up the pool of potential candidates, and in this case, they make up the potential pool of political leaders. A possible flaw in looking at this relationship is the relatively low number of women that are in leadership positions. In 2005, of the 315 state legislators holding leadership positions nationwide, 39, or 12.4% were women. Of the 1,998 state legislators chairing standing committees nationwide, 389, or 19.5% were women (CAWP 2007). While there is much variation in the number of women actually serving in office, generally speaking the number of women serving in leadership positions is low across the country. Twenty-six states have no women serving in leadership positions at all.

When looking at the influence of women's status on the percentage of Democratic and Republican legislators, again we see less significance than in the relationship between status and the total percentage of women legislators.

Table 4. The Significance of Women's Status on the Percentage of Women in Leadership Positions

	Number of Obs.	50
	F (7, 42)	3.73
	Prob. > F	0.01
	R-squared	0.38
	Adjusted R-squared	0.28

Percentage of Leadership Positions Occupied by Women	**Coef.**	**Std. Err.**	**t**	**P > |t|**
% Women Voted	-0.04	0.29	-0.14	.89
% Women Labor	0.34	0.51	0.66	.51
Wage Ratio	0.95	0.48	0.96	.06
% Health Insurance	-0.82	0.42	-1.97	.06
% College Education	0.97	0.48	2.02	.05*
% Women Business	1.77	0.92	1.92	.06
% Women Poverty	-0.06	0.17	-0.37	.71
Constant	-56.59	41.44	-1.37	.18

** = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001*

Tables 5 and 6 reveal that the percentage of women in the labor force has a significant relationship with both the percentage of Democrats and Republicans in office (in inverse directions). One explanation (although perhaps against conventional thinking) for why states with Republican legislatures have more women in the workforce is that these states may be more accepting of women working in general and therefore more women are willing to run for office. The opposite may exist in Democratic legislatures. Education has a significant relationship with only Democrats.

Table 5. The Significance of Women's Status on the Percentage of Democrats in State Legislatures

	Number of Obs.	50
	F (7, 42)	4.46
	Prob. > F	0.01
	R-squared	0.43
	Adjusted R-squared	0.33

Percentage of Legislature Comprised of Democrats	**Coef.**	**Std. Err.**	**t**	**P > |t|**
% Women Voted	0.41	0.40	1.04	.31
% Women Labor	-2.90	0.69	-4.20	.01***
Wage Ratio	0.67	0.66	1.02	.31
% Health Insurance	0.96	0.57	1.68	.10
% College Education	1.79	0.65	2.73	.01**
% Women Business	1.37	1.25	1.09	.28
% Women Poverty	-0.19	0.23	-0.83	.41
Constant	23.09	56.38	0.41	.68

** = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001*

Traditionally, women have composed a much lower portion of Republican legislators than Democratic legislators. Within the last decade women have increased from 22 to 28% of Democratic legislators and decreased from 18 to 17% of Republican lawmakers (Norrander and Clyde 2005). This pattern could suggest that a larger pool of potential women candidates would have a relationship with the number of Democrats in office. Despite this trend, I did not find an overwhelming significance between women's socioeconomic status and the overall percentage of Democrats and Republicans in office. It is worth mentioning that like women in leadership positions, education did result in a significant relationship with the number of Democrats in office. This suggests that education is particularly important in electing Democratic women to leadership positions.

Table 6. The Significance of Women's Status on the Percentage of Republicans in State Legislatures

	Number of Obs.	50
	F (7, 42)	2.97
	Prob > F	0.01
	R-squared	0.33
	Adjusted R-squared	0.22

Percentage of Legislature Comprised of Republicans	**Coef.**	**Std. Err.**	**t**	**P > |t|**
% Women Voted	-0.10	0.42	-0.25	.80
% Women Labor	1.86	0.72	2.58	.01**
Wage Ratio	-1.19	0.69	-1.73	.09
% Health Insurance	-0.94	0.59	-1.58	.12
% College Education	-1.28	0.68	-1.87	.07
% Women Business	-1.02	1.31	-0.78	.44
% Women Poverty	0.23	0.24	0.97	.34
Constant	131.95	58.96	2.24	.03

** = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001*

Conclusions

Across the country there is a wide range in the number of women elected to state legislatures. In some states women make up as much as one-third of the total legislature, while in others women comprise as little as a tenth. This trend has important implications because past research suggests that women legislators have a unique policy impact, which includes a focus on women's issues. From this, several assumptions could be argued about the impact made by women in states where they have more or less representation.

The natural question that flows from this is the following: why do women have more representation in some states than in others? Is there something that makes a state more willing to elect women to its state legislature? The answer to this question is not easy. There are several factors that are influencing the number of women in office including incumbency, low turnover rates, and careerism (Burrell 1994; Carroll 1994; Palmer and Simon 2006). But these explain why women are being kept out of office

across the country. What is creating such a range between states in the amount of women that are serving in state legislatures? One factor is the status of women. States with women who have a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to have a higher percentage of women in their state legislature. An explanation for this is that when the status of women increases the potential pool of candidates also increases. One reason for this result is that women with more education and employment in professional occupations are more likely to run for office (Burrell 1994). Additionally, women are more likely to be elected in wealthier districts with higher education levels (Rule 1981; Welch 1985; Nechemias 1987; Burrell 1994; Palmer and Simon 2006).

Flammang (1985) and Thomas (1991) argue that women legislators are more likely to introduce legislation dealing with women's issues when they receive support, particularly from other women. This idea can be used when looking at encouraging women to run for office. Women are more likely to run when they are encouraged by other women holding office. Women who live in states with a lower percentage of women in office most likely receive little encouragement to run for office. This idea also emphasizes the importance of groups that are dedicated to encouraging and helping fund campaigns for women such as EMILY'S List. These groups serve as both the emotional and financial support for women who are looking to run for office.

It appears that education is influential on the percentage of women in leadership positions. But variables that showed significance with the total percentage of women in legislature such as wage ratio and business ownership did not prove significant with leadership. There are several reasons this may have occurred, including the fact that the overall percentage of women who are in leadership position remains low. There are still several states that do not have any women serving in leadership position within their state legislature. Another factor is that the trouble getting women into leadership positions may have more to do with the institution of the legislature and less to do with the status of women and the candidate pool. Once women actually are elected to office they have to deal with a whole set of issues, including the dynamics of an institution that traditionally has been a "good old boys' club." These institutional barriers may be a better indicator of the low percentage of women in leadership positions.

Finally when looking at whether the status of women is influential on party in the legislature, socioeconomic status can be telling (Sanbonmatsu 2002, Palmer and Simon 2006). States where women are a larger part of the labor

force lean Republican in their legislature, while states with highly educated women tend to lean Democrat. While these results do not say anything directly about the number of women in state legislatures, they do reveal some possible indicators of party control in legislatures. Presently there are far more Democrat women serving in state legislatures then Republican women. This trend can potentially be attributed to liberal states having more egalitarian gender attitudes than conservative states. Thus, legislatures in states that lean Democrat are seen as more likely to elect women. Additionally, Sanbonmatsu (2002) explains that differences among parties in electing women can be attributed to each party having a different eligibility pool. In other words, socioeconomic differences between the parties could be an explanation of the varying number of Democrat and Republican women elected to office.

The status of women clearly has an influence on the number of women elected to state legislatures. As the socioeconomic status of women increases, so does the potential pool of women that are willing to run for office. Characteristics such as education and professional experience are often associated with potential public office candidates. Researchers have found that once women run for office they are just as likely to win as men (Darcy and Schramm 1977; Welch 1985; Burrell 1994; Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994). The key to getting women elected to office lies in encouraging them to run.

One way to increase the amount of women that run for office is to increase the pool of potential candidates. Although Fox and Lawless (2002) argue that even women who fall into the "eligible pool" of women candidates do not express high levels of political ambition, I would suggest possible ways to increase the number of women who might consider running for office. Education was significant in three of the four regression tests I performed. It resulted in a statistically significant positive relationship with the number of women in legislature, the number of women in leadership positions, and the number of Democrats in state office. This trend is telling. Education is clearly vital to getting women to not only run for office but to win. I would argue that educating and encouraging women to run for office while they are in school is extremely important to increasing the pool of potential candidates. While there are groups like EMILY'S List created to help encourage and fund women candidates, these organizations can only reach so far. Encouraging female students to run and emphasizing the potential policy impact they could have once in office could be an effective way of increasing the female candidate pool.

Beyond the socioeconomic status of women there are several other factors influencing the number of women in a state legislature that can help to explain the large range between states in female legislators. One factor is that the structure of legislatures differs from state to state. Some state legislatures meet full-time, while others meet for a few months a year, and still others meet only every other year. More women serve in part-time legislatures than in states where lawmaking is a full-time job (Norrander and Wilcox 2005). This could be because a part-time position allows for more time with the family and more flexibility for a working mother. Another reason for this trend is that full-time legislatures have more competitive elections and may attract more male candidates.

Another more obvious factor is that some states are just more willing to elect women to office. States with more liberal attitudes and public opinion presumably have a less traditional view of women and a greater willingness to elect them to office. Additionally, women are more likely to win in states with more Democratic voters and less likely to win in states with more Republican voters. This solution to this obstacle is not easy, as it includes convincing voters who have a more conservative view of a women's place that women are competent enough to hold public office and will legislate in a fashion that reflects their views. Quite often women are seen as more liberal than they actually are, which can hurt their campaign, especially in a very conservative district.

The work I have done here specifically analyzes the influence that socioeconomic status of women has on the number of women in state legislatures. There are of course many other factors that go into explaining why there is such a large range between states in the amount of women that serve in their legislature. In order to make the most effective suggestions as to how to increase the election of women, all of these factors must be looked at together. Although my analysis shows that the status of women has an influence on the number of women elected, a more comprehensive analysis is required to answer the broader question of how to increase the amount of women in office.

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