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Organizations, Women, and Political Participation

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Introduction

Female participation in politics has been a constant concern for many decades. One should know that this started when females received the right to vote in 1920, which general knowledge of all Americans. From there, the revolution of equality took off in the direction of gender and race. Today, statistics show that women make up between 11.1% and 41.0% of the governing body in state legislatures ("Center for American Women and Politics"). Political scientists are trying to understand why some states have less female representation in the state legislatures than others. It is certainly a challenge, because there are many factors that affect this outcome. One factor that this paper will be looking at is political culture, which gives people a certain outlook on politics, while incorporating organizations that help females get elected is needed for this type of research.

Specifically, this paper looks at what southern states like Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama could do in order to make sure more women are involved in state politics just like the more "progressive states" like California, Arizona, and Illinois. This paper goes into detail about how states with low female representation in the state legislatures can increase the number of females present and active in politics. When organizations are added to the political mixture, it is hoped that the political culture is shifting into a more progressive way for the citizens, as well as the people who are being elected into office. The higher the presence of organizations that endorse females to be a part of government in a state, the more likely it is that women will participate in state politics, which changes the political culture.

Literature Review

Women in legislative positions have evolved throughout the last fifty years or so in American history. In the past two decades, women have been appointed and elected into some of

the highest positions in the executive and legislative branches. It is evident that women in the more progressive states like California, Arizona, and Illinois, have a distinct place in the legislatures, what some would call the "progressive states." However, the southern states are the complete opposite. A very low percentage of women are involved in politics in the southern states like Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. These states are adapted to social norms, or what some political scientists would call the traditionalistic outlook on politics. Political scientists are constantly trying to understand what events made women more involved in state politics.

Two realms of thought were discovered in the research process. The first is a historical background, looking at and analyzing the significant events that took place in American history that politically socialized women, making it more acceptable for women to participate in state government. The Civil Rights movement and stating what the important factor were when bringing racial equality in the United States. Secondly, there were models; previous research done that can be applied to the concept of women becoming more socialized into state politics. These will be another creative facet for the research presented about how women became involved in state politics and what recommendations can be given to the more "traditionalistic" states.

Han talks about the history of women in politics in detail, giving very specific instances. Women did not seek legislative positions until the 1960s and 1970s, when the women's movement was prevalent the United States. The women seeking positions wanted to change the policies that pertained to them (Han 83-84). Since the political movement of women, the number of women serving in state legislatures has increased at a very slow rate (Han 2007, 86). Han's research can be applied to the research of how women became involved in the state legislatures.

However, there are some limitations, because the concepts Han talks about are very broad over a vast number of years in American history. Plus, there are a few of cases mentioned, nothing too generalized, like how Nancy Pelosi made an impact for women in Congress, since she became the first woman to be Speaker of the House (Han 2007, 92-93). Those examples are too specific when looking at six states in America that are all politically, socially, and ethnically different. A more detailed outline of what happened since the 1990s is needed to have a general sense of what occurred to make women more involved; this is a great way to make recommendations for the states that have a low percentage of women in elected positions, as well as understand how and when women became more involved in state politics.

Swers states that adding women into governmental bodies increases the chances of issues important to women being talked about on the floor and in committees (Swers 2002, 129). She also finds that the diversity of women, whether they are Republicans of Democrats, is just as important as males having differences than women (Swers 2002, 126-127). This may be scholarly research, but it seems that this research does not include recent political developments, meaning there are new findings in political science about women being involved in state politics. Also, Swers' research is repetitive; it falls into a major category in political science that is essentially overdone. The problem with repetition is that new findings are not acknowledged as much. There needs to be an expansion of women studies in order for research findings to be significant and helpful to other researchers.

In the United States, women gradually made their voices heard though the civil rights movement and beyond. This historical movement made the debate known that women wanted to represent constituents in the state legislatures. In *Women Transforming Congress*, women are stated to be divided in society, a bind that was and still is hard to break. However, women in

legislative positions are seen as responsible (Rosenthal 2002, 62-64). This normative concept can be applied to research that will help other states become more willing to accept women as politicians. It is also important to note that women politicians bond with other women in their state, which makes an impact on how others perceive women in a legislative position (Rosenthal 2002, 66-67). Hopefully, other women will be inspired by the examples of women in state legislative positions, increasing the number of women in elected positions. It seems that the cultural movements shape how Americans perceive women in state legislatures, an idea that will appear in the later research.

The books mentioned above are the foundation of the involvement of women, the historical background, in state legislatures, but to fully expand the analysis and recommendations for states with a lower percentage of women involved, models can be used. There is a model that has been constructed, and it has been used to see how the environmental movement occurred in America. There is a pre-movement which is where the social movement is trying very hard to make an initial move. In the early movement, people are not aware of the particular movement, so those involved are spreading the word (Gale 1986, 206-209). In the later stages, like the established and mature movements, individuals involved have a desire to make an impact, because there will be significant struggles to keep people informed and motivated to support the movement (Gale 1986, 222).

His model can be applied to how women became involved in state politics. In fact, when looking at the states that are have a smaller amount of women politicians, the model can be used to see exactly where the states are in terms of letting women have a more predominant role in state politics. With that said, recommendations will follow, because this model can also be used to understand where the more progressive states went after, for example, the established

movement stage. More research on the current status of each state will be needed in order to make this model successfully implemented into recommendations.

Lastly, it is known that people in society are not generally aware of women's involvement in state politics. Perhaps the reason the "traditional states" are not as supportive of women representation is because those individuals in those states do not necessarily understand gender-related political knowledge (Sanbonmatsu 2003, 369-370). A lack of knowledge is difficult to measure, so using pieces of this research will significantly help to test the hypothesis this research will prove or disprove.

Methodology

In this paper, a qualitative analysis of the political culture will be researched. Specifically, one should look at what caused women to become more politically active in the state legislatures. States like Arizona, Illinois, and California will be used as models for other states that have less women participation in legislatures, such as Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. The goal is to make recommendations for these "traditional states," Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama, based on what has happened in the "progressive states," Arizona, Illinois, and California, to increase women participation. The words progressive and traditional will be defined early in the analysis, since those are specific to political culture. However, there are challenges such as each state having different reasons for women becoming more active in state legislatures. Another concern is that the incorporation of women in state politics might not have happened at the same time for Arizona, Illinois, or California.

Collection of data regarding to political culture is necessary to see how the "progressive states" differ from the "traditional states." This will give one an idea of how political culture affects politics in each state, specifically the participation level of women. Journal articles and

state newspapers will be used in this part of the analysis. A person cannot measure political culture in a state, so the presence or absence of organizations that endorse female participation in state legislatures is an important secondary portion of the analysis. Websites will be used for this part of the analysis. Recommendations as well as conclusions will be drawn by bringing both the political culture aspect through the state and even national organizations. A case study is essential for a research paper such as this, because perhaps, in the end, one can draw a normative perspective on the analysis, meaning this could apply to other "progressive" and "traditional" states.

Analysis

Political culture cannot be measured, so using organizations that endorse females for representation in the state legislatures is another aspect that researchers should look at when they are analyzing the difference between "progressive" and "traditional" states. Emily's List, New Leaders Council, and Running Start are just a few of the many organizations that endorse females in elections. Those organizations are essential to understanding the reasons why certain states have more female representation than other states.

Emily's List hopes to elect pro-choice Democratic women into all levels of government. This organization trains, recruits, and supports women candidates, and this was seen when Nancy Pelosi became the first woman as a Minority leader in Congress in 2002 ("Emily's List"). Later she became the Speaker of the House. Emily's List was there to support her. In that same year, Emily's List helped with the election of three female governors. Two of the "progressive states," California and Arizona, have Emily's List working in their states, which leads to victories for females in all levels of government ("Emily's List"). This organization believes in opportunities for women by researching who is in need of financial and moral support to be elected. Emily's

List is very passionate about bringing more women into all levels of government, because this organization believes that this will lead to great equality ("Emily's List").

Another non-profit organization that endorses females is the New Leaders Council. All of the "progressive states" are involved with this organization. The mission of the New Leaders Council is to train and support the next generation of leaders, so this organization essentially helps young women in the age range of 22 to 35 ("New Leaders Council"). Though this organization is quite small, the impact is grand, because people from MSNC, Washington Monthly, and The Atlantic have made great compliments on the New Leaders Council, such as how different and innovative this organization is. New Leaders Council hopes to have a rippling effect that spreads from its current council members to the public ("New Leaders Council"). However, the New Leaders Council has helped more Conservative leaning females, unlike Emily's List, who helps Liberal females ("New Leaders Council").

Running Start, like New Council Leaders, is interested in helping young females who plan on running for an elected office. This organization wants to motivate young women to get involved with politics at an early age, because they are truly the future of women and politics ("Running Start"). "Running Start introduces young women to role models, talks to young women about the importance of politics in their lives, and gives them the encouragement and skills to pursue a career in political leadership" ("Running Start"). Females across the United States can be a part of this organization, hence all the states studied in this case study analysis were a part of Running Start. In a mission statement on the organization's website, it is stated that the goal of Running Start is to increase the representation of women in politics across the country, because this country is far behind other countries around the world that have more

female representation. Running Start believes that experience is the key to leadership, so the sooner females understand politics and how it can benefit them, the better ("Running Start").

In these organizations, one can incorporate the model from Gale, which, as stated in the literature review, has steps that socially mobilizes either a policy or idea in the public. First, there is what he calls the pre-movement stage, which is where the social movement is trying very hard to make an initial move (Gale 1986, 206-209). From an organizational standpoint, this is the hardest stage, because not many people know about organizations, like Emily's List, New Leaders Council, and Running Start, and do not see the potential for helping people become elected into offices. The public is not aware of the organizations presence, something that could potentially shift political culture. Emily's List was created in 1985, and a year later Barbara Mikulski was elected into the US Senate ("Emily's List"). This is just one example of how powerful organizations are, and as long as there is money and people interested in what that organization stands and advocates for, then people, in this case, women will be elected into offices.

One can see that the implementation of an organization like Emily's List helping women, specifically Democratic women who are pro-choice, become elected into office. This leads into the early movement of Gale's model, where people involved with the organization are spreading the word (Gale 1986, 209). In the early movement, people are not aware of the particular movement, so those involved are spreading the word, creating power within the organization which radiates outside of the group in hopes to gain more followers or members. Later on, one can see the established and mature movements, where the organization is seen as a much more legitimate part of the political system. Those individuals involved want to make an impact, because there will be significant struggles to keep people informed and motivated to support the

movement (Gale 1986, 222). Emily's List has done a great job with keeping up with the demands of the members of this organization, because the group has become stronger as the years progress. Conducting a project like WOMEN VOTE! in 1996 or creating the Political Opportunity Program to help females running in local and state elections ("Emily's List").

The model that Gale explains is just one that can incorporate organizations that endorse female-mobilizing organizations through elections. Another journal article, also noted in the literature review, explains how people lack knowledge, which makes them less likely to understand what is happening around them (Sanbonmatsu 2003, 369). Perhaps the reason the "traditional states" are not as supportive of equal representation of women is the lack of understanding of gender-related politics. Although, this may be true, the New Leaders Council is involved with other organizations, like Louisiana Progress, to help people understand the importance of politics in the world ("New Leaders Council"). Since states that are more traditional, based on their political culture, are moving in a new, progressive direction, these states are more accepting of women in political positions; there is a push from other allied organizations. Each state is gaining knowledge about gender and politics by support from organizations. This is seen in states similar to Louisiana that were lacking knowledge on the subject, until organizations like New Leaders Council, was added to the political system ("New Leaders Council").

Recommendations and Conclusion

Adding organizations to the more traditional states, such as Louisiana, Mississippi, and Georgia will definitely increase the number of women elected into office. Right now the percentage of women serving as a legislator in Louisiana is 11.8%, Mississippi 17.8%, and Georgia 13.6% ("Center for American Women and Politics"). This percentage of female

participation at the state level, specifically the two chambers of the legislative branch, is much lower than the three progressive states: California with 26.7%, Arizona with 35.6%, and Illinois with 31.1% ("Center for American Women and Politics"). Since all three of these "progressive" states have the presence of New Leaders Council, as well as California and Arizona being involved with Emily's List, shows that these organizations are helping with the election of females into the legislatures. The proliferation of Running Start throughout the United States is the beginning to the overall increase of female representation in state legislatures. In fact, this goes back to the idea of the pre-movement, where a group or organization is trying to gain support from the pubic (Gale 1986, 209). All of the "traditional" states are caught in this cycle that the author has mentioned, which is most likely the hardest part of the entire process, because if members of those organizations do not grow, then the increased number of females represented will also not grow.

There are significant struggles within the "traditional" states, because their political cultures are not as accepting towards women becoming politicians. States like Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, just need to push their organizations to the public more. Once the organizations gain support, it is believed that more women will be elected into offices at the state level. However, Running Start is a fairly new organization, founded in 2007, and just because this organization is present in a state does not necessarily mean that citizens are supportive of its ideas, which in a way disproves the hypothesis presented at the beginning of this paper ("Running Start"). In fact, the best route for "traditional" states is to create their own organization that works directly with concerns that are based specifically on the political culture for that state. The organizations are driven by political culture, so a more refined, appropriate

hypothesis for this research is the more organizations specific to a region of states the more

likely females will be represented in state legislatures.

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