

Factors Affecting Female Representation in State Legislatures

Researchers have long studied the apparent disparities between women's proportion of the population and the proportion of public offices they hold. Specifically, previous research has analyzed the attitudinal, institutional, and situational factors contributing to differences in the levels of female representation among states. In light of the scarcity of current research on this topic, this paper will re-examine several of these factors, including the socioeconomic and political characteristics of constituencies, the extent to which a state embraces traditional values, the state's policy priorities, and the state's geographic and demographic characteristics, in order to gain a better understanding of their relevance to politics today. Of all of the variables tested, this paper finds that region, education, population size, and Protestantism are most strongly correlated with female representation. In the end, these findings suggest important policy implications for women's representation in state legislatures.

Megan Leigh
John Carroll University
mleigh07@jcu.edu

INTRODUCTION

In the past 50 years, the situation of women in American life has changed significantly. More women work outside the home than ever before. Today, a majority of the college degrees awarded in the United States are granted to women. In addition, the fight for equal pay is making steady, albeit slow, progress. However, these successes in academia and the workplace have not translated into the political arena. In the 109th Congress, there are only sixty-eight female representatives in the U.S. House and fourteen female senators in the U.S. Senate. Gender disparities in representation also exist on the state level. However, some states have achieved greater equality in representation than others. For example, Washington, at 40.8%, has the greatest percentage of women in its state legislature, while Alabama has the lowest, with women comprising only 8% of the state legislature. What accounts for such apparent variations in the percentage of women legislators among the states? Several attitudinal, institutional, and situational factors may help explain these differences.

It is important to understand the reasons behind the “gender gap” in political representation in order to find ways of closing that gap. Women are just as intelligent and capable of governing as men and deserve an equal opportunity to make their voices heard. In addition, in many instances, women have a unique perspective to bring to the issues of public policy. Therefore, exploring and addressing the problem of inequality in political representation benefits not just women but also all of society by enriching and expanding political dialogue. Thus, this paper will explore previous research on gender disparities among states in terms of political representation. In light of the scarcity of current research on this issue, it will then reexamine this question by analyzing the impact of several factors, including the socioeconomic, political, and geographic characteristics of constituencies, the extent to which a state embraces traditional culture, and the state’s policy priorities, on gender representation in state legislatures.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although the issue of political representation remains important today, current literature on the topic is limited. Much of the research, done mainly in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, argues that attitudinal, institutional, and situational factors combine to affect female representation in state legislatures. In terms of attitudinal factors, a great deal of attention was paid, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, to the effect of gender-role attitudes, or the orientation constituencies have regarding women’s “proper role” in politics (Lee 1976; Arceneaux 2001). In 1976, Marcia Manning Lee found that, “...the nature of sexual role assignments and role expectations in America...are such that they deny to most American women equality of opportunity to compete against men for elected public office and elite positions of power in our governmental system” (Lee 1976, p. 297). First, Lee identifies factors that do not prevent women from holding public office, including lack of interest and willingness to commit time to politics and a belief that politics is too corrupt. However, in Lee’s study, three factors appeared significant in explaining variations in female legislative representation. The first important factor was the presence of children. Motherhood significantly limits a woman’s ability to pursue public office because the culture, both at that time and, if only to a lesser extent, today, delegates the responsibilities of child-rearing to her. Faced with such a massive

responsibility, women are less willing and/or able to commit to the late and unpredictable hours public office demands. As a result, Lee finds, a low percentage of women run for office during the childbearing and child-rearing years. However, children affect women's participation in public office even after they are grown. Since they committed their younger years to raising children, mothers of grown children are less likely to have gained the experience and contacts necessary to pursue a political career later in life. Women's own perceptions of their proper roles in politics were a second factor found to be significant in Lee's research. In the 1970s, even women themselves did not feel that politics was a proper activity for women. Almost 79% of women felt that others would not approve of their political involvement. Moreover, 35% of women did not necessarily agree that "more women should run for public office in the future."

Subsequent research by David B. Hill further supports this hypothesis, arguing that "Americans are socialized to believe that politics is men's work and not an appropriate pursuit for women" (Hill 1981, p. 160). In fact, Hill's study demonstrated that the impact of political culture is even stronger than that of institutional factors, explaining 40% of the variance in female representation (1981). In addition, Lee's study showed that women have a lower sense of political competence, or a belief that they are capable of holding political office and that their participation makes a difference. Finally, Lee found that a fear of sex discrimination also significantly impacted a woman's decision to pursue public office. As Lee points out, whether or not reality supports this fear is irrelevant. The mere fact that women believe discrimination exists significantly affects female representation (Lee 1976).

More recently, Kevin Arceneaux's research demonstrated that gender-role attitudes do, in fact, still impact the level of female legislative representation on a state level independent of political culture and ideology. In some states, voters and party leaders have been conditioned to accept politics as a man's world. According to Arceneaux, negative gender-role attitudes may influence female representation by causing women to feel it would be inappropriate for them to run for office, by biasing party officials against women candidates, and/or by influencing voters to vote against women candidates who make it to the ballot (Arceneaux 2001). Although Arceneaux agrees with previous findings that general attitudes toward gender roles affect female representation, he objects to the operationalization of such attitudes in terms of political ideology. As he explains, although it is assumed that conservatives have more traditional gender-role attitudes, it may be that conservatives are instead less open to female candidates because they oppose the specific policy positions of many women, especially on the so-called "women's issues."

Previous research by Irene Diamond also supports the link between female representation and political culture. According to Diamond, "moralistic" political cultures, which emphasize public welfare, are more conducive to female legislators than "traditionalistic" cultures, which seek to maintain the status quo (Hill 1981). However, Carol Nechemias predicted, in 1987, that the women's movement would eventually make this distinction obsolete as more women energetically pursue their political aspirations. Despite this prediction, Nechemias' own research showed that the political culture

became an even more important factor in the 1980s than in the 1960s (1987). Later, Susan Welch and Donley T. Studlar found that, even well into the 1990s, the resilience of the traditional political culture in the South continued to pose an obstacle to female representation in the region (1996). Finally, according to Arceneaux, state and regional attitudes on gender roles continue to affect female representation, even independent of ideology and political culture (Arceneaux 2001). However, once again, Nechemias argued that the women's movement would ultimately obliterate these beliefs (1987).

Other explanations focus less on attitudinal and cultural factors and more on political and institutional factors, such as turnover rates, district magnitude, and legislative salaries (Arceneaux 2001; Matland and Brown, 1992). High turnover rates are correlated with greater female representation because fewer races involve incumbents, who tend to be male. Races involving incumbents discourage women from running because the incumbent has greater access to resources than challengers and usually wins by a sizable margin (Arceneaux 2001). Research by Nechemias and Welch and Studlar also supports this hypothesis (1987; 1996). Considering these findings, Jewell and Whicker argue that term limits, by decreasing the number of races involving incumbents, should increase female representation (1993). In terms of district magnitude, multimember districts offer a greater opportunity for female politicians, since voters are more comfortable voting for a woman when they may also cast a vote for a male. In addition, party officials may actively seek out female candidates in order to balance the ticket so as to appeal to female voters. As Richard E. Matland and Deborah Dwight Brown explain, multimember districts produce an advantage for women by changing elections from a zero-sum game to a positive-sum game (1992). Also, the campaign strategy of multimember district races is more conducive to the female personality because it allows them to focus on gaining votes for themselves instead of attacking their opponents. In addition, in multimember district elections with several candidates on the ballot, the rarity of a female politician will set her apart from other candidates (Matland and Brown 1992). The study by Matland and Brown contributed much to this hypothesis by demonstrating that the effect of district magnitude remains even when controlling for such variables as urbanization and political culture (1992). Furthermore, Nechemias' research demonstrated that female representatives are less likely to be elected in districts with large populations, probably due to the increased resources needed to campaign in such districts (1987). High population states are also less likely to have significant female representation for similar reasons (Rule 1981). Also, higher legislative salaries tend to make races more competitive, which places women at a disadvantage. Hill's research produced similar results (1981). However, Rule's research contradicted this hypothesis, finding no significant link between legislative salaries and female representation (1981).

In addition, many studies demonstrated that, especially until the late 1980s, women were excluded from office, in some instances, because of the selection and recruitment biases of Democratic Party leaders (Rule 1990). For example, Emmy E. Werner found that in each year since the early 1930s, except during the Depression and the New Deal eras, there were more Republicans than Democrats among women in state legislatures. This is likely due to the Democrats' strong base in the traditionalist South

and the practice of choosing the sons of immigrants, or the “local boys who have made good” (1968). Nechemias’ work further supported this hypothesis (1987). In her research, Wilma Rule explored whether Republican dominated states still exhibit greater female representation than Democratic dominated states and found that they, in fact, do have greater proportions of female legislators. However, she also found that, in “new wave” states, those which had the greatest percentage increases in female recruitment in the 1980s, the effect of Democratic domination was beginning to diminish and the differences in the percentages of female representatives between Democratic and Republican states were beginning to equalize (1990). Indeed, later research by Matland and Brown showed that, by the late 1980s, women fared significantly better in Democratic districts. This increase in the number of Democratic female representatives is likely to have occurred as the Democratic Party became more aware of the gender gap and, as a result, moved to provide more support to “women’s issues” in order to capture the female vote (1992). Today, according to Welch and Studlar, the Democratic Party offers more of an advantage to women, with over 60% of women state legislators elected as Democrats.

Also, Werner found that the extent to which states support social welfare policies influences the degree of female representation in state legislatures (1968). Werner’s research showed that as states focus more on education, social welfare, and family life and direct more of the budget to such policy areas, female representation increases. This is most likely because such policy areas are consistent with the “home-policy” viewed as proper for women and with the role of women as wife, mother, and nurturer (Werner 1968; Rule 1981). As Rule explained, when welfare policy becomes more important, eligibility expands to those who have concern and expertise in such areas (1981). Rule’s later research showed that this trend continued into and through the 1980s, with state AFDC and education expenditures strongly and positively correlated to female representation (1990). However, Jewell and Whicker posit that, with the increasingly conservative anti-government character of government, women who support such policies may be at a significant disadvantage (1993).

Finally, some studies examine situational factors, which look to constituency characteristics and the circumstances of women, such as access to education, professional development and familial responsibilities to explain patterns of female representation. Similarly, Malcolm Jewell and Marcia Lynn Whicker argue that trends, such as the increasing entrance of women into the workforce, the diversification of the family structure away from the preference for the traditional nuclear family, the increasing popularity of second careers, especially among baby boomers, the increasing prevalence and prominence of women’s groups, such as NOW and EMILY’s List, and the growth of women newscasters and political commentators, have encouraged more women to seek office (Jewell and Whicker, 1993). Research by Rule and Welch and Studlar further supports the idea that the proportion of female legislators increases with the proportion of professional women in the workforce (1996). As Welch explains, legislators tend to come from the middle or upper class, have high education levels, and have certain prestigious occupations, such as those in business and law (1978). According to Jewell and Whicker, this correlation may be explained by the fact that the presence of more

professional women increases the acceptability of women working outside the home and creates a new “women’s agenda” of workplace and childcare concerns (1993). Level of education and professional attainment are even more significant in predicting membership in the “more professional” legislatures. Rule’s work provides further evidence for the belief that increasing women’s groups increases female representation (1990). Jewell and Whicker support the idea that the diversification of the family structure increases female representation by increasing the range of acceptable roles for women (1993). Finally, Jewell and Whicker argue that the growth of women newscasters and political commentators increases the number of female candidates for the future and increases the acceptability of women candidates by demonstrating a link in popular opinion between women and politics (1993).

Other studies regarding the relationship between female representation and situational factors have focused on the socioeconomic characteristics of a state. For example, Nechemias found that socioeconomic factors, such the levels of constituency education and income, are positively correlated with female representation (Nechemias 1987). Nechemias’ research demonstrated that, in the 1960s, a higher percentage of female representation is likely to occur in states in which the population is better educated and more well-off. Furthermore, due to the women’s movement’s association of education with feminism, Nechemias believed, this effect grew even stronger by the early 1980s (1987). However, later research by Welch and Studlar failed to support the hypothesis linking female representation and constituent income (1996). These mixed findings provide an opening, which future research would do well to explore.

It is important to note that each of these factors and sets of factors may influence female representation in one or more of the three stages of recruitment: eligibility, candidate selection, and election, and all three stages must be considered when exploring the issue of female representation. However, this paper will focus mainly on factors that affect the selection and election of female candidates, due to the obvious increase in the number of women eligible for office. In light of the scarcity of current research on this important topic, this paper will re-examine some of the factors already analyzed in the literature, such as the socioeconomic and political characteristics of constituencies, the extent to which a state embraces traditional family values, the state’s policy priorities, and the state’s geographic and demographic characteristics, in order to gain a better understanding of their relevance to politics today. Several hypotheses testing these factors are presented in the next section and tested in the data analysis section.

HYPOTHESES

H₁: The higher the education levels of citizens of a state, the greater the female representation in that state. Previous research has supported this hypothesis. However, it is important to examine it again with current data, due to the increasingly broad access to higher education. There are several ways that education can remove the barriers to female representation. First, one might expect that more highly educated voters would have been exposed to intelligent, capable women throughout their schooling and so would be more comfortable electing a female legislator. They would also be less likely

to accept the gender-roles traditionally assigned to women. Also, the greater the education level of a state, the more capable, eligible women there are to run for office.

H₂: The higher the income levels of citizens of a state, the greater the female representation in that state. Previous research on this relationship has proven contradictory. However, this research theorizes that female representation increases with constituent income because, similar to education, higher income often implies a job in one of the professional fields, in which voters are likely to encounter highly capable women. Also, the more well-off citizens are, the more willing they are to “risk” trying something new, in this case electing a woman representative. In addition, people with higher incomes tend to have fewer narrow stereotypes about the proper roles for women in society.

H₃: The stronger the support for Protestantism in a state, the lower the female representation in that state. The Protestant faith tends to advocate traditional family values and gender roles. The literature has consistently demonstrated that support for traditional family values is a detriment to female representation because of its emphasis on narrow gender roles and its belief that women’s proper sphere of influence is within the home caring for the children. Therefore, one would expect that Protestantism, which has taken the lead in promoting conservative political and gender attitudes, would function as a barrier to female representation. It is interesting to consider this hypothesis in light of the recent resurgence in support for such values and the prominence of the Christian Right in politics. As a result of such factors, it is predicted that this relationship continues to be strong.

H₄: The stronger the support for the Democratic Party in a state, the greater the female representation in that state. Previous research indicated that the Republican Party more strongly supported female representation (Rule 1990). However, work by Welch and Studlar shows that this trend is reversing (1996). Taking into account current party dynamics, one would expect that the Democratic Party would now be more strongly associated with increased female representation because of its more liberal attitude toward family values and gender roles and its support for “women’s issues,” such as abortion, education, and welfare.

H₅: The stronger the support for social welfare programs in a state, the greater the female representation in that state. Once again, states that support social welfare policies are likely to have more female representation because welfare is traditionally considered a “woman’s issue,” based on the stereotype of women as the more nurturing and compassionate sex. Therefore, as states focus more on issues of concern to women, one would expect female representation to increase. Also, the increased demand for experts in such policy areas may increase female representation because women may be viewed as more authoritative on such issues.

H₆: States in the Northeast and West are more likely to have greater female representation than states in the South and Midwest. This hypothesis is based on the traditional gender roles previously discussed. One would expect the West and Northeast

regions to be more liberal in terms of women and their roles in society. Also, the Northeast and West, with a high concentration of educational and professional opportunities, seem to be highly attractive to successful men and women. Therefore, if this is true, they should have a higher concentration of women with the proper qualifications for public office.

H₇: The larger the population of a state, the lower the female representation in that state. The literature has shown that increased population size of a state decreases that state's female representation because of the increased costs, in terms of time, money, and other resources, of campaigning across such a broad area. Today, as campaign costs skyrocket across the board, it is important to investigate whether this relationship holds.

H₈: The more highly urbanized a state, the greater the female representation in that state. The general assumption behind this hypothesis is that urban areas tend to be more innovative in terms of gender roles and political culture and also offer women more opportunities for an education and a meaningful career. Therefore, one would expect states with larger urban areas to have more female representation.

DATA AND METHODS

The independent variables are operationalized as follows. Education level of a state was measured by the percent of each state's population with a college degree or higher, with data collected from the *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2000*. This study operationalizes income level in a state as the state's median family income, according to the *Census 2000 Supplementary Survey*. Protestantism is measured by the percentage of the population who give their religious preference as Protestant, with data culled from the *American Religious Identification Survey (2001)*. Support for the Democratic Party is operationalized by two variables: the percentage of votes a state had for Senator Kerry in the 2004 presidential election, with data from the Federal Election Commission, and the percentage of a state's Democratic and Republican Congressional delegation that were Democratic, according to data from the Congressional Directory (2001).

This research measures support for social welfare programs by state welfare expenditures per capita, according to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States (1999)*. Region is operationalized in four categories: West, South, Midwest, and Northeast, consistent with the U.S. Census regions. This study measures population by the total state population in the *U.S. Census (2003)*. Degree of urbanization is measured by the percent of the state that is urban, according to the *U.S. Census (2000)*. Finally, this research operationalizes the dependent variable, female representation, as the percentage of women in state legislatures, with data from the *Statistical Abstract of the United States (2000)*. To test each of these hypotheses, a multiple regression analysis was conducted including all of the variables, except region because, as a nominal variable, it must be tested separately using ANOVA.

DATA ANALYSIS

A univariate analysis of the dependent variable (Table 1) reveals that the mean percentage of female representatives in state legislatures is 22.536%. The standard deviation is 7.355, demonstrating a fair amount of variation in female representation among states. Also, the percentage of female legislators in states ranges from a high of 40.8% in Washington to a low of 8.0% in Alabama. What factors explain this variation? The following analysis will test several factors.

Data analysis of the correlation matrix (Table 2) indicates that five of the eight variables expected to explain differences in female representation among states are significant in the bivariate analysis. The statistically significant variables, in order of the strength of their respective relationships with female representation are education level, income level, support for the Democratic Party (operationalized as support for Senator Kerry in the 2004 election), Protestantism, and urbanization. The relationships between female representation and support for the Democratic Party (operationalized as the percentage of the state's Democratic and Republican Congressional delegation that were Democratic), support for welfare spending, and population size were not statistically significant.

Although five variables were statistically significant in the bivariate analysis, one must next turn to the multiple regression analysis to determine whether these five remain significant while controlling for the effects of the other independent variables. As Figure 3 indicates, the model is statistically significant (Prob.=0.001), and Multiple R-Squared is 0.455. This means that this model explains 45.5% of the variation in the dependent variable. However, according to this analysis, only three variables remain significant independent of the others: level of education, population size, and Protestantism. For these three significant variables, BETA can now be used to determine how much effect each has on the dependent variable while controlling for the effects of the other independent variables.

According to this analysis, level of education continues to be the most important factor in predicting female representation. BETA for education level, operationalized as the percentage of the population with a college degree or higher, is 0.414, meaning that one standard deviation of change in the percentage of a state's population with a college degree or higher results in 0.414 standard deviations of change in the percentage of female legislators in that state. This result is statistically significant to the 0.05 level. Also, the relationship is strong ($r=0.500$). Using Pearson's r , the PRE measure of association can be derived. For education, as Table 4 shows, PRE=0.25, meaning that education level explains 25.00% of the variation in female representation among states.

The multivariate analysis also indicates that, although it was not significant in the bivariate analysis, population size is an important factor affecting female representation. BETA for the relationship between population size and female representation is -0.337 . This means that every one standard deviation of change in population size leads to -0.337 standard deviations of change in female representation. This result is significant to the

0.05 level. Still, the relationship is extremely weak ($r=-0.049$), and explains only 0.24% of the variation in female representation among states.

Finally, Protestantism is a strong predictor of female representation, even independent of other factors, although not in the direction posited in this paper. According to the analysis, BETA is 0.330 and is statistically significant to the 0.05 level, meaning that one standard deviation of change in the percentage of a state's population that is Protestant leads to 0.330 standard deviations of change in the state's female representation. This relationship is also strong ($r=0.347$), and it explains 12.04% of the variation in female representation among states.

In addition to the continuous variables tested in the multiple regression analysis, region, because it is a nominal variable, must be tested separately using the Analysis of Variance technique. According to ANOVA, shown in Figures 5-6, region was also a strong predictor of female representation. The West had the highest (Mean=27.676) and the Northeast had the second highest percentage (Mean=24.816) (Table 6). Next was the Midwest region with a mean only slightly higher than the overall mean (Mean=22.748). Finally, the South had the lowest percentage of female legislators, well below the overall mean of 22.536 (Mean=16.917). These results are statistically significant at the 0.000 level. Finally, as Table 6 shows, Eta-squared, which tests the strength of the relationship and the reduction in total variance that occurred as a result of dividing the cases into groups based on the independent variable, indicates that region accounts for 34% of the variation in female representation between states.

INTERPRETATION

This study set out to test the impact of several factors, including the socioeconomic and political characteristics of constituencies, the state's policy priorities, and the state's geographic and demographic characteristics, on female representation in state legislatures. Eight hypotheses were suggested. The results indicate that female representation is correlated with four variables: region, level of education, Protestantism, and population size. As the hypothesis relating region and female representation predicted, the West and Northeast regions of the country are likely to have greater female representation than the South and Midwest regions. However, female representation in the Midwest was only slightly lower than in the Northeast. Still, the South had, by far, the lowest levels of female representation in state legislatures. This is likely due to its dominant traditional political culture as previously suggested. These findings support the original hypothesis and findings in the literature. Therefore, in order to increase female representation, one might look at the institutional and cultural factors of politics in the South in order to work toward removing any obstacles blocking women from public office.

The hypothesis linking increased education with increased female representation was also corroborated by the analysis. Female representation does, in fact, increase as the education level in a state increases. This finding is also consistent with the literature. Based on this evidence, in order to increase female representation, states would do well to increase education opportunities to all citizens, and, perhaps, in particular to their female

citizens, so as to break down any remaining gender stereotypes and increase the pool of eligible female officeholders. This paper was also correct in predicting the relationship between Protestantism and female representation. However, the relationship does not manifest itself in the manner that was predicted. Contrary to the hypothesis, states demonstrating a stronger affiliation with Protestant denominations are actually likely to have more female representation than less Protestant states. This relationship completely conflicts with the literature and the theory that adherence to traditional family values and gender roles functions as an impediment to female representation. Still, it may well be that the literature and theories are correct, and this operationalization of support for traditional values in terms of affiliation with the Protestant religion was improper. In fact, it must be noted that not all Protestant denominations support traditional conservative views on women. Therefore, perhaps a better operationalization of this variable should measure the percentage of citizens in a state who espouse a more conservative Protestant creed. For example, one might expect that an analysis of the relationship between female representation and evangelical Protestantism would show the expected negative relationship. However, this is not actually the case, as the relationship is still positive ($BETA=0.308$). Therefore, further research would do well to investigate this interesting and unexpected finding. Finally, as was expected, female representation is negatively correlated with population size. As the literature suggested, this negative correlation is likely a result of the increased costs of campaigning across large areas. Therefore, one would expect that as campaign finance laws are reformed to lessen the influence of money in politics, female representation may increase.

In addition to these findings, this analysis is also significant for the nonfindings it produced. For example, this study failed to support the hypothesis connecting support for the Democratic Party and female representation. While operationalizing support for the Democratic Party as support for Senator Kerry in the 2004 election produced a strong positive correlation with female representation in the bivariate analysis, a second measure of Democratic Party support, the percentage of a state's Congressional delegation that is Democratic, was not statistically significant. Furthermore, in the multiple regression analysis, neither relationship was significant. Perhaps these surprising results occurred because, as the gender gap has appeared to narrow between the Democratic and Republican parties, one would expect that support for the Democratic Party would decrease in importance as a factor influencing female representation. This possible explanation would account for the discrepancy between this study and the research of Matland and Brown and Welch and Studlar (1992; 1996). Therefore, this question remains unanswered, and future research should continue to investigate this relationship.

In another interesting finding, the data analysis completely failed to support the hypothesis connecting female representation to support for social welfare programs in a state. This result contradicts not only the hypothesis but also much previous research. Perhaps these differences can be explained by the fact that, in the current anti-government political climate, support for welfare programs is down across the board. Therefore, the differences between states in terms of social welfare spending are not enough to affect the dependent variable, as Figure 7 seems to show. Another explanation for this surprising nonfinding might also be traced to voters' hostility toward welfare.

Following this line of reasoning, it could be that citizens in states that spend more on welfare might be more strongly opposed to such spending. As a result, they may fail to support female candidates who run on a platform of “women’s issues,” or they may, as a result of the resentment they hold toward welfare recipients, develop a negative attitude toward women in general. Also, it could be argued that states with a higher percentage of women who are struggling economically and socially would, of necessity, spend more on welfare. If this hypothesis is true, those same states would, because of the disadvantaged condition of their female citizens, have a smaller pool of women eligible for public office from which to draw. A scatterplot testing this hypothesis was conducted, but the results were not statistically significant. Therefore, this question remains unanswered, and future research should continue to investigate this relationship.

This analysis also failed to provide evidence for the relationship between female representation and urbanization. As this paper and the literature predicted, female representation should be stronger in highly urbanized areas because of the increased educational and professional opportunities they offer to women and the more liberal attitudes held by their populations. However, while urbanization was strongly correlated with female representation in the bivariate analysis, those results did not remain statistically significant while controlling for the effects of the other independent variables. While this result is surprising, it may be explained by the increased educational and, to a lesser extent, professional opportunities now available to all women, both urban and rural. Also, this analysis may have failed to produce the expected results because of the measurement of urbanization. Although it cannot be determined from the variable description, it would be interesting to know whether suburban areas were considered urban or rural in this measurement. If suburban areas, in which an ever-growing percentage of the population now resides, were not counted as urbanized, that might skew the analysis and explain this surprising finding.

Finally, contrary to the hypotheses, the investigation into the relationship between income level and female representation failed to produce statistically significant results in this analysis. Previous research, particularly by Nechemias, had supported the hypothesis predicting a positive relationship between the two variables (1987). However, this research was conducted in the 1960s and is, therefore, quite outdated. Most likely, the liberalization of attitudes towards women that has occurred during the past forty years played a large role in changing this relationship. Across all economic classes, in the last several decades, people’s attitudes and beliefs regarding women’s competence in public office and their right to representation have become more positive. As a result, no significant percentage of any economic class continues to have qualms about women in positions of power.

CONCLUSION

According to this research, several factors still limit women’s access to public office. Where these factors persist, female representation lags. Lack of education among constituents is probably the most important factor continuing to hamper female representation. In addition, states with large populations provide less favorable climates for increased female representation. Also, regional differences continue to impact the

percentage of female representation in states. However, as operationalized in this study, support for traditional values no longer impedes women's progress in the political arena. In fact, according to this research, Protestantism, as a measure of traditional values, is strongly and positively correlated with female representation. Also, this analysis suggests that previous findings no longer hold regarding party affiliation and female representation. In the past, the Republican Party tended to be more favorable to female representation. However, according to this study the Democratic Party no longer provides women with any significant advantage in terms of representation. Finally, this research contradicts previous research positing a connection between female representation and a state's welfare spending and between female representation and income level. Thus, additional areas of interest to future researchers become apparent. Regardless of these or past findings, future research must be done until the levels of female representation become consistent with women's proportion of the population. Women deserve a voice, and society deserves to hear it. As Marcia Manning Lee (1976) argues, the restriction of one group's political participation is and always will be inherently inconsistent with democratic government.

Table 1: Percentages of Women in State Legislatures (2000)

Rank	Case Name	Value
1	WASHINGTON	40.8
2	ARIZONA	35.6
3	NEVADA	34.9
4	COLORADO	34
5	KANSAS	32.7
6	VERMONT	32.6
7	NEW HAMPSHIRE	32
8	OREGON	30
9	CONNECTICUT	29.9
10	MARYLAND	29.3
11	MINNESOTA	28.6
12	MAINE	28.3
13	NEW MEXICO	27.7
14	CALIFORNIA	26.3
15	MASSACHUSETTS	26
16	IDAHO	25.7
17	ILLINOIS	24.9
18	MICHIGAN	24.8
19	MONTANA	24.7
19	RHODE ISLAND	24.7
21	NEBRASKA	24.5
22	FLORIDA	24.4
23	DELAWARE	24.2
24	WISCONSIN	23.5
25	MISSOURI	22.7
26	HAWAII	21.8
27	NEW YORK	21.3
28	UTAH	21.2
29	IOWA	20.7
30	OHIO	20.6
31	GEORGIA	19.5
32	WYOMING	18.9
33	TEXAS	18.3
33	ALASKA	18.3
35	NORTH CAROLINA	18.2
36	INDIANA	18
37	WEST VIRGINIA	17.9
38	NORTH DAKOTA	17.7
39	TENNESSEE	17.4
40	VIRGINIA	16.5
41	LOUISIANA	16.2
42	NEW JERSEY	15.8
43	ARKANSAS	15.6
44	SOUTH DAKOTA	14.3
45	MISSISSIPPI	12.9
46	PENNSYLVANIA	12.7
47	KENTUCKY	11.6
48	SOUTH CAROLINA	10.7
49	OKLAHOMA	10.1
50	ALABAMA	8

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients

	MED_FINCOM	%PROT01	%KERRY04	%URBAN00	COLL_DEG00	DEM.CONG	WELFAR/CAP	TOTPOP03	F.LEGIS00
MED_FINCOM	1	0.353 **	0.565 **	0.591 **	0.790 **	0.224	0.089	0.183	0.452 **
%PROT01	0.353 **	1	0.245 *	-0.039	0.232	-0.12	0.191	0.03	0.347 **
%KERRY04	0.565 **	0.245 *	1	0.353 **	0.531 **	0.556 **	0.441 **	0.266 *	0.422 **
%URBAN00	0.591 **	-0.039	0.353 **	1	0.437 **	0.154	-0.169	0.436 **	0.309 *
COLL_DEG00	0.790 **	0.232	0.531 **	0.437 **	1	0.141	0.143	0.153	0.500 **
DEM.CONG	0.224	-0.12	0.556 **	0.154	0.141	1	0.323 *	0.148	0.083
WELFAR/CAP	0.089	0.191	0.441 **	-0.169	0.143	0.323 *	1	-0.157	0.011
TOTPOP03	0.183	0.03	0.266 *	0.436 **	0.153	0.148	-0.157	1	-0.049
F.LEGIS00	0.452 **	0.347 **	0.422 **	0.309 *	0.500 **	0.083	0.011	-0.049	1
LISTWISE deletion (1-tailed test)		Significance Levels: ** =.01, * =.05							
N: 48 Missing: 2									

Figure 3: Regression Table

	BETA	STANDARD ERROR
MED_FINCOM	-0.293 (r=0.452)	1032.15
%PROT01	0.330* (r=0.347)	0.27
%KERRY04	0.394 (r=0.422)	1.22
%URBAN00	0.276 (r=0.309)	2.21
COLL_DEG00	0.414* (r=0.500)	0.63
DEM.CONG	0.005 (r=0.083)	3.52
WELFAR/CAP	-0.267 (r=0.011)	31.1
TOTPOP03	-0.337* (r=-0.049)	0.94
R-squared = 0.455**		
N = 48		
F = 4.062		
Prob. > F = 0.001		

Table 4: Percent of variation explained by each significant factor = (r²)100

COLL_DEG00	%PROT01	TOTPOP03
25.00%	12.04%	0.24%

Figure 5: Female Representation by Region

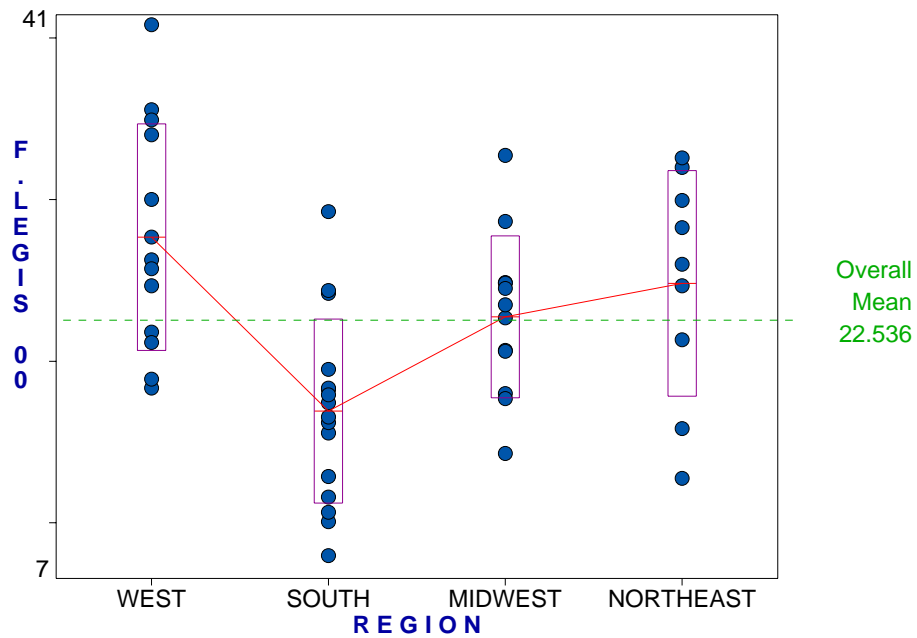
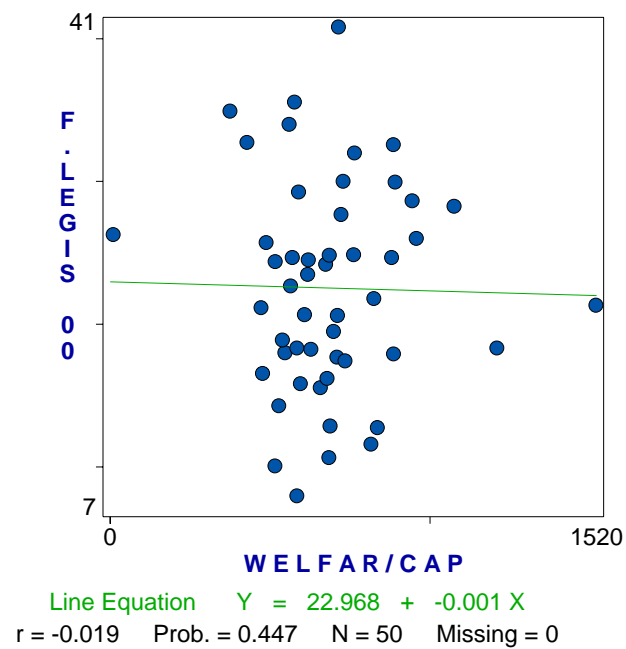


Table 6: Female Representation by Region (Means and Std. Dev.)

	N	Mean	Std.Dev.
WEST	13	27.676	7.007
SOUTH	16	16.917	5.691
MIDWEST	12	22.748	5.004
NORTHEAST	9	24.816	6.98
Prob.=0.000			
ETA Square=0.340			

Figure 7: Female Representation by Support for Social Welfare Programs



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arceneaux, Kevin. (2001, March). The "Gender Gap" in State Legislative Representation: New Data to Tackle an Old Question. *Political Research Quarterly*, 54 (1), 143-160.
- Camobreco, John F. and Barnello, Michelle A. (2003, Summer). Post-Materialism and Post-Industrialism: Cultural Influences on Female Representation in State Legislatures. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, 3 (2), 117-138.
- Hill, David B. (1981, February). Political Culture and Female Political Representation. *The Journal of Politics*, 43(1), 159-168.
- Jewell, Malcolm and Whicker, Marcia Lynn. (1993, December). The Feminization of Leadership in State Legislatures. *Political Science and Politics*, 26(4), 705-712.
- Lee, Marcia Manning. (1976, Summer). Why Few Women Hold Public Office: Democracy and Sexual Roles. *Political Science Quarterly*, 91(2), 297-314.
- Matland, Richard and Brown, Deborah Dwight. (1992, November). District Magnitude's Effect on Female Representation in U.S. State Legislatures. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 17(4), 469-492.
- Nechemias, Carol. (1987, February). Changes in the Election of Women to U.S. State Legislative Seats. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 12(1), 125-142.
- Rule, Wilma. (1990, June). Why More Women are State Legislators. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 43(2), 437-448.
- . (1981, March). Why Women Don't Run: The Critical Contextual Factors in Women's Legislative Recruitment. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 34(1), Special Issue on Women and Politics, 60-77.
- Welch, Susan. (1978, September). Recruitment of Women to Public Office: A Discriminant Analysis. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 31(3), 372-380.
- Welch, Susan and Studlar, Donley T. (1996, December). The Opportunity Structure for Women's Candidacies and Electability in Britain and the United States. *Political Research Quarterly*, 49 (4), 861-874.
- Werner, Emmy E. (1968, March). Women in the State Legislatures. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 21(1), 40-50.