Diploma Thesis: Do Women Represent Women?

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Abstract

There is an implicit assumption behind advocating for women in elected offices that descriptive representation of women lead to a corresponding political output. This would mean that gender is one of the indicators of legislative behavior. To examine the role of gender in the substantial representation of women, I focus on the agenda setting process, which I measure as the sponsorship of group interest legislation. Data include all bills introduced in lower Houses of ten states, which provide necessary variance to control for party effect, overall ranking of the status of women, and level of women's presence in a state legislature. If a gender of a legislator is crucial for his or her legislative behavior, I should find a significant difference in a sponsorship of women's issue bills, which are the bills directly concerning women, as well as of other bills.

Theory

Since the 1970s, the number of women legislators has dramatically increased. From mere five percent, women now comprise over 20 % of the state legislation. Even though the growing body of literature suggests that gender influences policymaking process and how representatives define their constituency, they do not show considerable differences or do not address the possibility that differences attributed to gender are better explained by other factors. Therefore, increasing women's presence might be not necessary, nor sufficient for legislative action on behalf of women rights.

Aims

In my study, I expect to find a lower rate of bills concerning women. Past research describes situation a decade and more older. However, gender inequality is no more perceived as a pressing matter and parties have already incorporated gender issues into their programs, responding to a growing presence and influence of women in all part of social and political life. Therefore, I assume male legislators to initiate women issue's bills as the same rates as female politicians.

Based on that, I anticipate other factors to pose a greater influence on representatives' legislative behavior. Social identity is one of them but it is not defined only by gender, but also by race, education, income and previous occupation. Legislative choices are also mediated by political environment, especially by a party, which substantially shape not only the ideological content of the bills but also legislator's orientation. Studies show that members of a committee tend to introduce bills related to their committees and that representatives' seniority effects substantive content of an introduced bills. Another factor is the urbanness of the district. Cities serve as a proxy for a political affiliation because they tend to be more liberal.

By examining these factors known to influence legislative behavior, my research can more accurately evaluate to what extent is gender a predictor of agenda setting in the form of sponsorship of women's issue bills and provide the most updated picture of mediators of legislative behavior.

Research Design

Methodology

The hypotheses are tested with data containing information regarding legislation introduced in ten state legislatures during the regular session in 2015. Data include all bills introduced in lower Houses of the state legislatures of Alabama, Arizona, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, and Oregon. These ten states provide variance in the overall ranking in the status of women in that state, a party controlling the state legislature, and historic political affiliation. In order to determine the gender differences in the support for women's issues, only these states with high presence of women in legislatures

Only substantive proposals for new bills were considered as a bill introduction, excluding nonbinding resolution and memorials. Information was gathered regarding the sponsorship characteristics accounting for: gender, party, committee membership, and the bill characteristics such as a type of the bill.

Each bill was coded and organized according to its substantive content. A special category was created for so-called women's issue bill - bills concerning only women. No other criteria for this category were included in order to avoid normativity and potential exclusion of some women-related measures. However, they are classified based on the content, evaluating whether they promote or restrict women's rights.

Data

Studies suggest that the differences in political behavior are most evident during the process of agenda setting. These differences are measured as the sponsorship of group interest legislation. Therefore, the unit of the analysis is a bill.

Bill categorization: (dichotomous coding)
Women's interest or not
Content of women's interest bill (pos or neg)
Gender of sponsor
Committee membership of sponsor
Party of sponsor
Majority and minority party status of sponsor
Seniority of sponsor
Urbanness of district
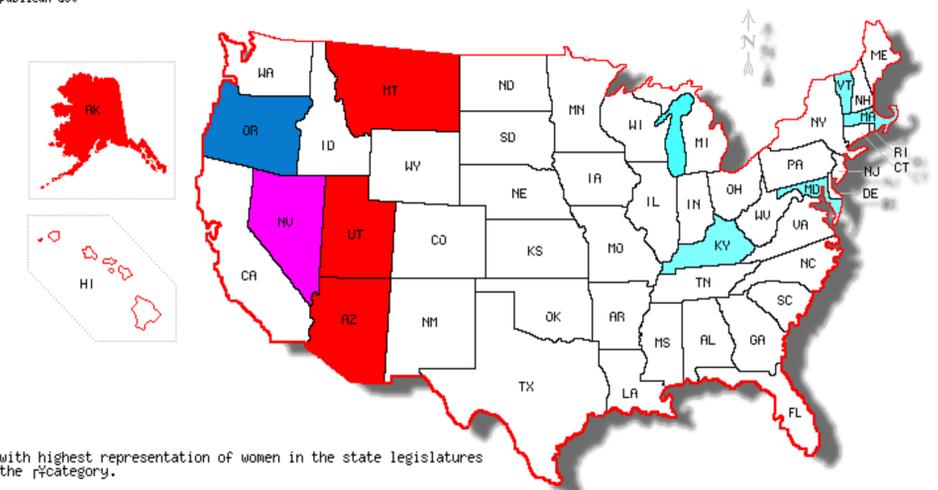
Data Analytic Plans

Two separate binomial logistic regression analyses will be conducted. One will examine the relationship between coded variables and sponsorship of women's interest bills and content of women's interest bills as dependent variables. The second analysis will be similar but includes all bills introduced in the lower legislative body.

General Categories of Introduced Bills

- Agriculture
- Banking, Finance, and Business
- Civil Rights, Minority Issues, and Civil Liberties
- Community Development and Housing
- Defense
- Health
- Education
- Energy
- Environment
- Family
- Law and Crime
- Government Operations and Administration
- Guns Laws
- International Affairs
- Macroeconomic
- Park, Fish, Hunting, and Games
- Science, Technology, and Communication
- Social Welfare
- Tabaco, Alcohol, and Marijuana
- Transportation
- **Women's Issues:** Abortions, Women's Health Issues, Gender Discrimination, Sex Crimes, Parental Leave and Child Care, Marriage, Divorce, Domestic Abuse, Child Support, Child Protection, Adoption, Family Employee Benefits, Counseling Programs, Abandonment, Child Custody, Child Visitation, Equal Pay Act

Selection of State Legislatures

- Democratic Gov
- Democratic/Split Gov
- Republican/Split Gov
- Republican Gov

NOTES:
States with highest representation of women in the state legislatures within the category.

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