Women in Government: 
Comparison of Local and State Political Candidacy

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ABSTRACT

Women in the United States are dramatically underrepresented in comparison to men serving in elected public office. This distinct dichotomy is both a reactionary response by female candidates choosing to run for office as a lower percentage than men as well as a causal product of campaign barriers limiting women from being elected. In this thesis, the dilemma of women’s political underrepresentation in public office is analyzed at the local level, offices including school board and city council, and at the statewide level, offices including governor and state legislature. Women tend to hold a greater percentage of local office seats as opposed to seats in the state legislature. This thesis analyzes the key differences that female candidates will face between seeking office at the local level as opposed to the statewide level. A call-to-action for women to begin seeking public office across all levels requires a specification of different tactics, depending of the office sought.
OVERVIEW: Women in United States Politics

Women make up fifty-one percent of the United States population but only hold, on average, twenty percent of elected office (“Political Participation,” n.d.). An elected position is constituted by an election hosted for public office where a decision is determined by a public vote. The percentage of elected offices held by women includes every elected office from local school board member positions to seats in the United States Congress. The phenomenally disproportionate ratio of women holding office to women making up the population has led to a spike in research focused on bringing women to serve in elected office. Though the United States will enter a centennial celebration of the women’s suffrage movement in 2019, the number of women still trail their male counterparts in elected office.

Women in the United States make up the largest demographic of the voting population that are not only registered to vote, but also show up at the polls to turn in a ballot. Currently, sixty-seven percent of women who make up the voting aged population are registered to vote and almost half of these women voted in the 2012 general election (“Political Participation,” n.d.). Men not only vote at a much lower rate than women do but are also registered to vote at a lower rate than women as well (“Political Participation,” n.d.). The voting aged population includes individuals in the United States who are qualified to vote which includes being at least 18 years old, a citizen of the country, no felonies convicted, and not actively incarcerated. Women only gained the right to vote in the United States since 1919 following the women’s suffrage movement, a civil rights crusade for women to receive the ability to vote that culminated in the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment. Though they received the power to vote, women did not immediately make their prominent mark in political voting patterns until mid-twentieth century.
The history of women’s voting patterns differs greatly from current trends in voting across the United States. A remarkable leap of involvement in voting occurred across the country for both men and women during the 1952 Presidential Election of Dwight D. Eisenhower (Boyd, 1968, p. 56). However, in 1966, only fifty-three percent of voting aged women exercised their right to vote following the Eisenhower presidency (Boyd, 1968, p. 56). This decreasing pattern in women’s voting participation was attributed at the time to women’s sporadic interest in politics. It was assumed that age was the determinate for the sporadic interest as younger women were noted from shifting political interests from one party to another more frequently than any other age group (Boyd, 1968, p. 57). Though age was the original determinate, it is noted that when women’s education levels increase, they are more likely to shift their political alignment than women with lower education levels. Though education may not stand as the sole causal component, it remains highly correlated with women’s shifting interest between political parties. When women attain some level of higher education, they are generally categorized as politically independent, a term that describes an individual who has formulated their own thoughts without any overarching authority or pressure to align in a particular fashion (Boyd, 1968, p. 57). The increase of women attending higher education institutions shows correlation to an increase in women’s political independence and sequentially increases their voter participation. Following their increase in voter participation, women started seeking public office, though at a much slower rate than they were voting.

Women began making their most impactful entrance into the United States political arena during the 1970s when a record thirteen percent of women were holding office (Miller, 1986, p. 75). Though they were beginning to establish a defined and notable interest in politics through voting patterns, women were much slower establish a large, active representation in public office.
The reasons attributed before the 1970s for women not seeking elected office included lack of preparation to campaign for a seat, political efficacy, and suitability (Miller, 1986, p. 75-76). Society originally placed full responsibility for the political gender inequity solely on women, emphasizing the concept that women are not actively represented in public office because they are ill prepared or they are not going to be suitable to serve the community. Concurrently with the first wave of feminism beginning in the 1960s, and strengthening in the 1970s, the inequality of women holding office was shifted onto voters for scrutinizing female candidates unfairly in comparison to male candidates (Miller, 1986, p. 82). Additionally, female candidates were societally pressured to only run for public office that catered to maternal roles or interests such as municipal or school board seats (Miller, 1986, p. 82). Women were so motivated to seek an increased number of elected seats, they doubled their percentages in running for office over a twenty year span lasting from 1977-1997 (Hogan, 2001, p. 4). Following the realization of society’s acceptance of women seeking office, female candidates began actively seeking more politically ambitious roles in government including higher ranked public office.

It may seem unclear as to why women should maintain political parity when discussing the number of female candidates running for office. Unlike male legislators, women’s experiences are noted to affect how female legislators advocated for women’s concerns not previously actively represented in legislation (Walsh, 2007, p. 2). The concerns advocated for in the legislature included childcare, women’s health and family values could be deemed “women’s’ rights legislation”. When women are elected into office, they are generally attuned to advocating for women’s rights and policies that positively affect women. Due to the emphasis on women’s advocacy concerns while in office, political active representation remains crucial for the female population.
SECTION 1: Local Political Candidacy Rates

Local candidacy generally refers to positions in municipal government, countywide office, or school boards. Female candidates tend to find more electoral success in local politics as opposed to any other level of government representation. For example, in the year 2000, 203 out of 978 American cities, with over 30,000 residents, elected women to serve as their mayor (Palley, 2001, p. 248). Additionally, though men still hold the majority of seats held on local elected school boards nationwide, the phenomenon of all-female elected school boards entered the political scene for the first time in the late 1990s (Palley, 2001, p. 248). Women are increasing both the number of female candidates, and number of female elected officials, in local elected office at a staggering rate, though men still outnumber women in city council seats, mayoral seats, and school board seats. Specific pathways towards local electoral success can be introduced to female candidates depending on their party affiliation and the amount of time they have engaged in their local community.

Female candidates running for a local public office can determine their electoral success based on two main factors: political partisanship and local community engagement. Political partisanship explores the decisive support of political parties in relation to a candidate’s affiliation, though local elected office rarely runs a partisan race. Local community engagement presents the idea that women find increased success when campaigning for elected office if they have more access to civically engaged constituents. These can sequentially determine a female candidate’s success for elected office. For example, female candidates who hold predominantly Democratic views, or run as a Democratic representative, tend to have a greater support system on the local partisan level, leading to a higher rate of electoral success. The same outcome is true of female candidates who have held leadership positions in local non-profit entities.
Local Political Partisanship

At the local level, voter support stems from a candidate’s alignment to a political party. In local elections, generally only two political affiliations are present in any given municipality: Democrat or Republican. Women hoping to seek elected office at the local level find a majority of their voter support after aligning with a political party even if the electoral race is nonpartisan, especially at the local level. The main factors associated the electoral success of a female candidate based on partisanship include whether an area is a Democrat-controlled region, a common disadvantage for Democratic candidates due to the wide variety of male competitors, and whether an area maintains a level of conservative rural politics, a common disadvantage for all affiliated candidates. The emphasis on political partisanship of female candidates begins with the structural success of the party on a local level.

Democratic women who file for candidacy in a local race tend to find greater success when they do not run for office in a Democrat-controlled region. For clarification, this means that if a Democratic female candidate chooses to run in a local race, whether it be bipartisan or nonpartisan, they will tend to have a greater chance at successfully winning that seat if they do not live in an already Democrat-controlled region (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 804). The greatest success for Democratic female candidates can be found in a region that has a healthy balance of Republican and Democratic representation. Though this seems like an unusual phenomenon, it can be attributed to the automatic assumptions recognized by both parties: the Republican party will rarely support female candidates at the local level while the Democratic party is supportive of female candidates only if there is not a more favorable male candidate. Due to the noted discretion of political parties’ support of female candidates, it has been established that Democratic female candidates are equalized in their lack of support to Republican women when they run for office in
a predominantly Democrat-controlled region (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 805). The phenomenon of Democratic female candidates finding less success in Democrat-controlled areas can be attributed to the limited pattern of “women’s political recruitment where party organizations have traditionally exercised more influence over nominations” (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 805). Women are not being recruited to run for office in Democrat-controlled regions because of the plethora of male candidates vying for the same position are recognized as more available candidates for nomination. The influence of political partisanship on a female candidate’s electoral success can also be recognized in rural local government.

Local government generally hosts a more accepting culture for women running for public office. However, in rural regions, women of any party affiliation will recognize a new set of obstacles based on a pattern of conservative presence that is less accepting of female candidacy. The correlation of women not holding office in rural regions can be directly related to a lack of female candidates stepping up to run for office. Women are not avoiding candidacy because they are not dedicated to serving their communities; women are not running for public office because they are being ousted by conservative constituents. In rural municipal governments spread across the United States, potential female candidates for citywide office were less likely to run than men because they felt they only represented a particular issue or there was a better available option (Ridge, 2016, p. 17). This is the product of “conservative rural politics”, a dramatic disapproval of female candidates because of a traditional or conservative political background, that does not coincide with women’s interests, plaguing small communities (Ridge, 2016, p. 20). Women who hope to run in a predominantly rural region will face opposition from conservative constituents who do not believe women’s political interests can coincide with the local needs of the partisan
community. Women of any political affiliation are prevented from serving in rural local office because of a perception of their main points of interest by conservative constituents.

**Local Community Engagement**

Women who run for local political office face far greater scrutiny from voters than men based upon their local engagement in the community. Local community engagement can be described in two ways: first, the number of citizens a candidate has made a connection within the electoral jurisdiction, second, the number of hours the candidate has dedicated to various entities or causes in the area. It is an ordinal measurement of a candidate’s ability to successfully reach out to constituents in a community. Local community engagement can determine the amount of support presented to a candidate based upon the internal access to fellow community leaders, the opinion of the female voter constituency group and the presence of civic volunteerism in a campaign. The distinction of local community engagement places an emphasis on female candidates for the need to be connected within their local community.

Women have the greatest electoral success in local politics rather than statewide or federal due to the ability for women to become engaged in their community’s public policy realm. The public policy realm includes greater access to community leaders or valued voting aged-constituents who are willing to share their grievances through nongovernmental organizations run by women. Nongovernmental or non-profit organizations led by women will generally aim to influence specific public policy topics that focus on environmental protection, healthcare, education and women’s rights (Paley, 2001, p. 249). As candidates begin seeking endorsements or policy advice from their local community to create their platform, women-led nongovernmental agencies will be more likely to share their concerns or recommendations for community policy to a female candidate than a male candidate (Palley, 2001, p. 249). This allows for the female
candidates running in a local election to gain a greater insight on their communities needs from an internal point of view rather than an assumed proposition based on their own findings.

For female candidates, the best constituency group to actively engage with in the community is women. Female voter turnout will dramatically increase in a local area if they are actively supporting another female as a candidate. In addition to support of female candidates on a community level, female voters tend to produce a greater turnout in local elections when a woman in running for elected office in their area (Palley, 2001, p. 250). Women are the top voting population for female candidates at the local level which has been assumed based on the personal connection female candidates make within their community compared to their male counterparts (Palley, 2001, p. 250). Female candidates find their greatest success at the local level because of the impactful connections made with female voters. Women who choose to run for office also focus heavily on community volunteerism which actively engages voters in civic activity.

Female candidates generally introduce a volunteer programming aspect to their campaigns for elected office to deepen their roots of concern and involvement within their community. Women rely on civic volunteerism when they run a campaign, particularly in municipal elections, which can include bringing on a fleet of canvassers or a campaign advisory team (-Miller, 1986, p. 76). Comparatively, men focus on business or personal connections that provide monetary value such as campaign sponsorships and fundraising opportunities (Miller, 1986, p. 76). This difference is based upon the concept that male candidates are generally provided a wider variety of social and business-based opportunities when campaigning for office than female candidates, forcing women to seek only a marginal amount of campaign-based opportunities (Miller, 1986, p. 76). The emphasis female candidates place on civic volunteerism influences local elections considerably in
their favor because they are now viewed as connected to the needs and wants of their community. Civic volunteerism is a stronger candidacy advantage than business-based opportunities.

SECTION 2: Statewide Political Candidacy Rates

As of 2017, women currently hold 1,840 seats out of 7,383 total seats in state legislatures across the United States (“Women in State Legislatures 2017,” n.d.). This represents a total of about twenty-five percent compared to seventy-six percent representing the number of men holding seats in the state legislature (“Women in State Legislatures 2017,” n.d.). Though the first woman to serve in any state legislature appeared out of Colorado in 1894, women have only significantly increased their percentage of seats held in the state legislature since 1971, after the monumental feminism waves took the United States by storm. The percentage of women serving in the state legislature has quintupled since the 1971 (“Women in State Legislatures 2017,” n.d.). Though twenty-five percent is the highest number of women to hold office on the state legislature level, women have held this same percentage point for the past decade with minimal to no improvement at times.

The percentage of women holding seats in local office can often be attributed to a misunderstanding that women are swiftly gaining speed towards political parity. However, women are still not making an impactful movement into any elected offices higher than the local political arena especially at the state legislature level. The national average of women holding office in state legislatures remains dismally low when compared to men holding the same level office. Additionally, there are significant differences between each state’s representation of women in legislature especially if the state lands in a specific region of the country. The two largest determinates of women’s electoral success in state legislature includes political partisanship and the introduction of the pipeline effect. These factors influenced the discrepancy across the country.
that spearheaded a misleading understanding of the true cause for disparity in women’s representation at the statewide level.

**Statewide Political Partisanship**

In the 1960s, women served equivalently in elected office for both the Democratic and Republican party. For example, after the conclusion of 1966 partisan state legislature elections across the nation, one-hundred forty-three women were elected to the state legislature for the Democratic Party bringing the number of Democratic women in statewide office to a total of one-hundred fifty-seven (Boyd, p. 54). Equally, one-hundred fifty-five women were serving in their respective state legislatures for the Republican Party (Boyd, 1968, p. 54). This represents an almost even number of women representing both the Republican and Democratic parties in 1966 statewide races which can be starkly contrasted from present day. Though these 1966 totals, when added together, show only three-hundred twelve women holding elected office out of all the legislatures for fifty states, women made a remarkable leap in active engagement in local office with an even number of representatives from the Democratic and Republican party. This contradicts the current representation of bipartisan women in state legislature today. Democratic women tend to serve in elected office at a higher rate when compared to their Republican counterparts.

Partisanship has now become a steering factor in statewide politics as women representing the Democratic party are outnumbering women representing the Republican party. Women started shifting away from a minimal but balanced level of representation in both major political parties in the 1990s when the Democratic Party began nominating an increasing number of female candidates (Tobin, 2016, p. 28). Concurrently, as the Democratic party began endorsing more female candidates in state legislative campaigns, more women began representing themselves as Democrats rather than Republicans leaving a two-fold imbalance of women seeking office wanting
to represent a left-leaning party (Tobin, 2016, p. 28). Due to this turn-of-the-century upswing in female candidates affiliating with the Democratic party, more women have become party leaders. Party leaders generally hold the greatest power when deciding campaign nominations. Male party leaders almost always nominate men while women are more likely to nominate other women (Tobin, 2016, p. 29). Since more women are becoming party leaders, a continuous cycle of finding support within the Democratic Party when seeking seats in state legislature has been established amongst female candidates.

There are dramatic differences in women’s political representation between state legislatures when compared to the national average of women in statewide office. For example, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, women’s political representation in state legislatures differed so greatly that in some states such as Alabama, only eight percent of legislators are women while, in states like Washington, forty percent of legislators are women (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 791). The major factors determining female candidates’ electoral success can be linked to a heavy influence of political partisanship and the strength of the party in that state (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 791). Each state represents an unofficial political party affiliation that can influence the support and success of female candidates seeking seats in the state legislature. This can be causally related to the elitist structure of political party affiliations versus representation of the masses. When a candidate chooses to run on a partisan ticket for any state legislature, they must fall within a pool of potential candidates who hold elite status, a combination of a high socioeconomic class and powerful stature, to increase their chances at electoral success. (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 793). Women are commonly excluded from this elite structure within political parties which leads them to become a voice or representative of the masses, people also secluded from elite society (Sanbonmatsu, 202, p. 793). This forces female candidates to face greater difficulty as statewide
office is heavily based on partisanship whereas, on the local level, most elections are non-partisan providing a greater success rate for women seeking public office.

**Pipeline Effect in State Legislature**

Women are believed to fare better in term-limited seats within the State Legislature. This trend is present in both the House and Senate, or lower and upper levels respectively. The shift from non-limited seats to term-limited seats was crafted as a political reform movement to assist underrepresented groups, like women, enter the political realm with ease (Carroll & Jenkins, 2001, p. 2). This can be accredited to the “political pipeline” effect which can be described as drafting women from lower-level offices into higher offices like state legislature in support of constant political reform for female representatives (Carroll & Jenkins, 2001, p. 23). Unlike local office that can include candidates with a variety of political experience or skills, candidates running for statewide office are expected to be hand-picked or endorsed by the incumbent when vacating a seat (Carroll & Jenkins, 2001, p. 23). When female state legislators are vacating a seat after their term has ended, women in lower-level legislature, or House representatives, will be drafted for the position as the favored candidate. For example, in early 2000, one-third of women serving in a statewide Senate were previously House representatives in their respective regions (Carroll & Jenkins, 2001, p. 23).

Women tend to fare worse in non-limited seats since men hold an advantage with winning a seat and maintaining it for an undetermined amount of time. This advantage is accredited to women generally posing as newcomers to the political scene hence the reason why the political pipeline effect caters well to this distinction. A prominent example of the pipeline effect in action hails from the state of Wyoming.

The state of Wyoming has always spearheaded rights for women before women’s rights became a nationwide perspective. For example, Wyoming initiated the first form of women’s
suffrage prior to the national movement to provide women the right to vote in 1919. Women in Wyoming began serving in their state legislature far before the 1971 boom of female candidates seeking statewide office. Yet today, Wyoming currently holds the lowest ranking of women serving in elected office, especially with only eleven percent of the state legislature constituted of women (“Women in State Legislatures 2017,” 2017). The dramatic transformation within Wyoming from a state attuned to gender parity in politics to, now, a region dismally marred by a lack of female representation stems from a shift in multi-member districts, a political district represented by two or more representatives, to single-member districts, a political district represented by only one representative (King, 2002, p. 168). Multi-member districts allow for the use of pipeline activity between upper and lower level members of the state legislature, creating more opportunity for women to serve in a greater number of seats. When shifted into a single-member district, women are not as easily introduced into the political sphere as a newcomer by their predecessor.

Women battle a greater number of culturally-based obstacles when running for office at the state level that don’t have as significant of an effect on men. When women run for office at a state level, standards set by political culture will determine if female candidates can find success outside of the contemporary pipeline effect. Statewide political cultures can be categorized into two separate distinctions: Moralistic and Traditionalistic (Hogan, 2001, p. 7). Moralistic political culture is categorized by acceptance of newcomers to the political realm who hold a vision for change. Traditionalistic political culture generally strays away from major policy changes, causing a tendency for constituents to reelect candidates for an extended amount of time. Women seeking office won their elections at a greater rate in states that confirmed a majority Moralistic political culture than states who followed a Traditionalistic political culture (Hogan, 2001, p. 16). These
underlying political cultures hold one of the most significant pressures on women running for office regardless of their party affiliation or previous involvement in politics but rather the culture of the region in which a candidate chooses to run for office.

SECTION 3: Local versus Statewide Political Candidacy

Women find greater success when seeking elected office at the local level in comparison to the statewide level. While several variables contribute to the apparent discrepancy in local versus statewide political candidacy, the two most prevalent factors are systemic gender barriers and partisanship. Systemic gender barriers exemplify the societal constraints of traditional gender roles on female candidates. For example, women are assumed to focus on feminine policy issues such as education and women’s rights, limiting them to a specific elected office that deals with those topics. In addition to systemic gender barriers, partisanship also holds a strenuous grip on a female candidates’ ability to succeed in elected office both on the local and statewide level. Partisanship focuses on both the political party affiliation of a candidate, the focus of issues in a candidate’s platform that can show a leaning towards a specific political ideology and the structure of a political party. Systemic gender barriers and partisanship attribute to the greatest difference between women holding office at the local versus statewide level.

Currently, there is no official count of women that hold local elected office across the United States. However, based upon the number of local seats in elected office and scholarly literature on municipal governments, there are more women in local level elected office than any other level. This includes all local elected positions such as school board of trustees, city council, mayoral seats, county commissioner court, district court clerks and county clerks. As for statewide office, 1,840 women serve in state legislatures within the United States (“Women in Elected Office 2017,” 2017). This includes the lower level chambers such as a House of Representatives and López 16
upper level chambers such as a Senate for all fifty states, apart from Nevada that maintains a single non-partisan chamber. The percentage of women holding local elected office outweighs the percentage of women with seats in the state legislature significantly.

Systemic Gender Barriers

Women’s involvement in local politics was dramatically visible sooner than statewide politics. This is accredited to the handful of states that began to allow suffrage for women distinctly in school-related elections prior to other elections. For example, the state of Kentucky began providing limited suffrage rights through school elections in 1838, shortly followed by Kansas in 1861 (Stucker, 1976, p. 211). Though women began making powerful movements toward political parity before the official suffragist movement, these permissions were only granted to women when they became widows (Stucker, 1976, p. 211). Additionally, the right granted to women to run in school-related elections was seen only as an extension of the traditional roles for women as it focused on child rearing and motherhood (Stucker, 1976, p. 214). Women were originally shunned by society after being granted these permissions on the basis that they were neglecting their presumed duties as mothers and wives. Yet these societal norms were mitigated for women on the basis that school-related elections would subscribe to child rearing and motherhood (Stucker, 1976, p. 213). Women did not begin making a significant movement towards advocating for policy outside of an educational focus such as energy policy and environmental conservation until the 1960s (Stucker, 1976, p. 214). The unbalanced difference of systemic gender barriers fostered women’s early involvement in local government for elected office such as school board as opposed to statewide offices. This pattern of imbalance found in local versus statewide political candidacy carried on into the late 1960s and beyond.
During the boom of female political candidacy in the 1960s, women faced a variety of adversities when seeking political office. One of the most prominent reasons contributing to the lack of women filing to run for public office included the constraints of traditional roles for women based upon societal norms. Due to these traditional gender roles set on women, female candidates faced a limited estimation of qualities (Boyd, 1968, p. 54). Women were seen as capable by voters of only holding office in positions that focused on feminine qualities including childcare, women’s health and education (Boyd, 1968, p. 54-55). Though a larger number of women began filing to run for office, most female candidates sought local office as opposed to statewide office. This huge demographic shift of female candidates from local to statewide office presented results that most elected women, during the 1960’s, held office on school boards and city councils (Boyd, 1968, p. 55). Statewide office did not hold the opportunities to advance on these policy topics. Not only did women face adversity when running for statewide office due to a lack of political elitism but women electively ran for local office more often than any other office because of the ability to successfully secure a seat was stronger (Boyd, 1968, p. 55). Slowly, women began branching out within the political arena to run for higher level elected office seats but still faced systemic gender barriers based on the societally presumed work-life balance.

Historically, women have been deemed inferior to male counterparts in all lines of work. In terms of political work, there are noted strong emotional blocks preventing women from entering politics because they feel they will be neglecting the “mother and wife” duties (Tobin, 2016, p. 20). Women will electively only choose to run for local office that will make an impact on their lives as mothers or wives including city council of school board (Tobin, 2016, p. 20). Sometimes, women will stray away from politics all together. When serving in a local government, women can convince themselves to run for elected office by creating positive change that can be
seen immediately and make an impact close to home (Tobin, 2016, p. 20) Additionally, societally based gender roles are discussed at length with research backing the concept that these societal roles are implicated by both men on women and women on themselves. For example, when the World Values Survey, or WVS, was conducted in 2008 across a wide variety of countries, there was a broad spectrum of attitudes related to the proper roles of women particularly in the political sphere. However, the western hemisphere held a consistent set of data points from an equal number of female and male respondents. When asked about a woman’s place in politics, both men and women responded equally negative to women serving in elected office claiming that women need to have children and dedicate a majority of their time to family in order to have a fulfilling life (Tobin, 2016, p. 26). It is the initial displeasure women show towards potential female candidates that prevents them from running for elected office. Women do not support other women initially becoming involved in politics yet once women are actively running in a campaign, their largest support group falls within the female population.

Female voters take different political ideologies into consideration when voting for female candidates. This selection of political ideology is based upon which end of the political spectrum that the voter sits on. Moderate women are most likely to be elected by pulling a majority of the female voter population’s favor as they sit as an even representative for both parties (Lewis, 1999, p. 1-4). The two differing opinions are traditional, with a focus on family values, and feminist, with a focus on gender identity and sexual harassment policies. Women running for local office tend to run a more traditional-values campaign while women running for statewide office tend to run a feminist-values campaign. Traditional gender roles have a huge impact on women holding office in more conservative or Traditionalistic political arenas (Ridge, 2016, p. 90) This emphasis on women being more likely to run a local campaign under traditional values will portray a high
volume of support from female voters, a population that tends to hold the highest percent of voter turnout in local elections (Ridge, 2016, p. 42). The imbalance between traditional and feminist campaigns is indicative of higher support from the female voters for candidates seeking local office as opposed to statewide.

**Partisanship**

Political party affiliations are recognized as one of the top determinant driving forces in female candidacy, particularly at the statewide elected office. When female candidates choose to align with a particular party when running for statewide office, an array of stereotypical characteristics and platform stances are assumed based upon the correlation from either end of the spectrum. Parties are regularly associated with different groups of individuals and their characteristics, which has caused the rise of radically separate paths to office based upon party affiliation (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 793). One of the precursors that can determine a female candidate’s likelihood of successfully winning a campaign is The Social Eligibility Pool theory, a conceptualization of female political candidacy based on the linkage of office seekers hailing from either a mass public or elite pool (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 793-794). For example, Republican female candidates tend to rise from an elite group of homemakers that have a greater amount of time and resources, while Democratic female candidates generally find interest in running for office in hopes of representing the mass public with backgrounds in the labor force (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 794-795). When a state holds a larger number of women in the workforce as opposed to women who tend to be homemakers, this is a strong indication of success for a Democratic female candidate (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 795). The difference between local and statewide legislation falls upon the notion that the social eligibility of a female candidate will not presume the status as a major precursor for local elections, as it does for state legislature elections. In addition to The
Social Eligibility Pool theory, a concept basing electoral success on the occupational status of constituents, The Political Opportunity Structure, is a second theory can be considered as a determinate for differences in electoral success based on local and statewide partisanship influences.

The Political Opportunity Structure predicts the success of a candidate upon emergence into the political field as a potential elected official on the basis of legislative professionalism, a concept built upon the idea that women are not the likely potential nominated candidate for higher levels of elected office such as state legislature (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 795). When an elected office is considered to require a higher amount of professionalism from the representative, a majority of female candidates that are considered more viable than a male candidate will tend to be Democratic (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 795). The higher appearance of Democratic women in state legislature based on the Political Opportunity Structure theory is positively correlated to the organization of the affiliated party on the state level (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 795). As a result, Republican women face more obstacles when seeking statewide office, because the seats are perceived to require a higher legislative professionalism, as opposed to local office, considered to require a lower legislative professionalism.

The distinct influence of partisanship can be exemplified in state legislature far greater than in local government. The electoral success of female candidates is more determinate of statewide election results as opposed to local election results due to the state-based statistics of female workforce participation and political opportunity based on socioeconomic stature. These precursor variables are components of both the Social Eligibility Pool, a determinate based on women’s involvement in the workforce, and the Political Opportunity Structure theories, a determinate based on legislative professionalism. This influence of partisanship remains visible in state
legislatures located in the New England area. New England state legislatures transitioned from making positive steps towards greater female parity in government to now a visible down shift in women’s involvement in politics. The greatest decrease of women’s representation in New England’s state legislatures occurs within the Republican party (Elder, 2013, p. 1). This pattern of women’s representation in government presents information that shows the dramatic “rightward” shift of Republican Party values pushes women away from running for office through the party or for office in general (Elder, 2013, p. 1). In addition, intraparty differences include the paradox that Democratic women are more liberal than Democratic men while Republican women are more conservative than Republican men (Walsh, 2007, p. 37). The aforementioned rightward shift of the Republican Party forces women to become extremely conservative, even more conservative than current Republican male legislators, to be supported or nominated by the Republican Party for statewide elected office. Women hoping to seek office on a statewide platform will face an exorbitant number of obstacles if they seek a Republican nomination as opposed to seeking a Republican endorsement on a local level.

Party leaders at the statewide level have begun interpreting subjective perceptions, ideas not founded on any facts or data, of a female candidate’s electoral chances as opposed to researched perceptions, information supported by factual knowledge. The candidate’s party leader will have a greater pull if they are running for statewide office as opposed to local due to the greater recurrence of bipartisan elections in higher level office. Statewide party leaders regularly claim that men have a higher advantage over women when discussing electoral chances but there is no research to withstand those claims (Sanbonmatsu, 2006, p. 438). The causal indication is that party leaders are misperceiving what voters feel towards female candidates, and in return, do not provide an even chance for female candidate to attain a party’s nomination. The Democratic party has
begun pushing research perceptions onto respective party leaders and women are sequentially winning equally to men due to the cancellation concept between states “higher than” ratings (Sanbonmatsu, 2006, p. 439). This means overall that women seeking a Republican party nomination aren’t running for office given their respective chances in their states.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the research presented in this thesis, it can be concluded that women hoping to run for public office will face an exorbitant number of obstacles, far greater than the number a male candidate would encounter. The transformation of women’s involvement in politics beginning with the suffrage movement in 1919, preconditional rights to run for school-based elections and finally a spike in female candidates across all levels of races has yet to produce a monumental step toward total parity between men and women serving in public office.

Due to the early advantages of women becoming involved most heavily in local office before any other level office, female candidates are more likely to find electoral success in a race such as city council or school board, yet men still outnumber women in these positions. This success does not come without conformance with determining factors, such as partisanship and community engagement, that must be met to a high standard. Female candidates are more likely to be successful in their campaigns when they run with a Democratic-leaning platform in a non-Democrat controlled region. Women who choose to run with a Republican-leaning platform tend to face greater difficulties especially in conservative or rural regions. Additionally, when women install an element of civic volunteerism to their campaign, they are more likely to win the favor of the voter base over a male candidate.

Women’s representation in state legislatures differs greatly from the percentage of women holding local elected office. Partisanship holds the strongest influence on a female candidate’s
electoral success for statewide office. Women who seek the support of the Democratic party will find greater success than Republican candidates due to the rightward shift of the Republican party. Additionally, while the pipeline phenomenon has assisted in recruiting more women to run for higher level statewide office, men still significantly outnumber women in state legislatures.

Today, women hold a greater number of elected seats at the local level than the state legislature level. The differences in women’s representation on the local and statewide level results from an uneven emphasis on systemic gender barriers and partisanship. Women running for a local level office face far less discrimination due to systemic gender barriers, the societal norm that women must fulfill duties as a mother and wife above all else, because the office sought tends to focus on issues related to education, family and childrearing. This has caused a cycle of women only choosing to run for local office assuming they have the greatest chance for success rather than seeking a higher-level office. The influence of partisanship on women’s political candidacy remains more influential for statewide office rather than local office. Women who run for a statewide seat must rely on the support of a party far more than a female candidate seeking local office. However, female candidates running for office on a Democratic ticket will maintain wider success than Republican female candidates due to the stronger presence of female voters in favor of the Democratic party overall.

When women are not represented in politics, they are less likely to become involved beginning a cycle of minimal political engagement for women. Solutions must be presented that stress the importance of proper candidate recruitment and training in order to increase the chances of ending the cycle of male dominance in electoral office. The solution to the gender disparity in politics cannot solely be found by increasing the overall number of female candidates. There must be an emphasis for recruitment methods to bring women into higher office. The number of women
running for office must be substantially increased in the offices farthest from gender parity including statewide office. Recruitment methods should be crafted that will allow women to find a path to office while maintaining specific tactics related to the candidate’s campaign and platform.

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