



# Year of the Woman, Decade of the Man: Trajectories of growth in women's state legislative representation <sup>☆</sup>

Pamela Paxton <sup>a,\*</sup>, Matthew A. Painter II <sup>a</sup>, Melanie M. Hughes <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Sociology, 238 Townshend, 1885 Neil Avenue, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210-1222, USA

<sup>b</sup> University of Pittsburgh, Department of Sociology, 2400 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, 230 Bouquet Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Available online 28 August 2008

### Keywords:

Women  
Gender  
Politics  
State legislatures  
Year of the woman  
Growth curves

## ABSTRACT

The expansion of women's political representation ranks among the most significant trends in American politics of the last 100 years. In this paper, we develop two longitudinal theories to explain patterns of growth and change in women's state legislative representation over time. Gender salience suggests that years in which women's absence from politics is problematized (e.g., 1992—the Year of the Woman) will demonstrate higher levels of growth. Political climate suggests that periods in which domestic issues are stressed (e.g., the 1990s) will produce higher levels of growth than periods in which international issues are stressed (e.g., post 9/11). Combinations of these two theories create four possible trajectories of growth in women's representation that may be observed over time. We use latent growth curve models to assess the four theoretical trajectories, using data on women's state legislative representation from 1982 to 2006. We find that while women achieved fleeting success in the Year of the Woman, further gains were limited in the remainder of the 1990s and average growth stalled completely after 2001. Our results show further that gender salience and, to a lesser extent political, climate matter to growth and change in women's political power over time.

© 2008 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Women's participation in American politics has increased over time and is one of the most significant trends in American politics of the last 100 years. Over a century and a half, women first gained the right to vote in a territory (Wyoming, 1869), appeared in the US Congress (1916), gained the right to vote nationally (1920), reached 10% of Congress (1992), and reached 40% of a state legislature (Washington, 1994). Women have also ascended to the highest appointed offices including the Supreme Court and major cabinet positions. Yet, despite this remarkable change, we do not know the answers to even basic questions about patterns of growth in women's representation over time. For instance, has women's representation increased steadily over time or do women only gain power during certain, particularly favorable, periods?

Looking back over the last 30 years, one election year stands out as a potential watershed moment for women's political representation in the U.S.: the Year of the Woman in 1992. The label, Year of the Woman, accurately describes this election year not just for the number of women that ran for and achieved political office, but also for how they ran. At the national level, 24 new women were elected to the House and five to the Senate, increasing women's representation in Congress from 6.4% to 11%. At the state level, 69 additional women were sworn into state legislatures, raising the proportion of female state

<sup>☆</sup> We thank Dave Jacobs and the Social Science Research reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier draft. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the National Science Foundation (SES-0549973 and SES-0703318).

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [paxton.36@osu.edu](mailto:paxton.36@osu.edu) (P. Paxton).

legislators from 18.4% to 20.4%. Aside from these raw numbers, how women ran for office also merits consideration. In this election, women ran for office explicitly as women and openly campaigned that their womanhood was a strength. In short, gender was overtly salient during 1992 in a way that was not observed in previous or subsequent elections (Dolan, 2001; Hansen, 1997). Any attempt to understand women's representation in American politics over time must consider the Year of the Woman and its potential for lasting influence on women's political representation in the United States.

But other longitudinal processes may have operated in 1992, and in other years, to affect the growth of women's representation. Most important, the political climate of distinct historical periods as either domestically or internationally focused may create a multi-election climate that is favorable or unfavorable for women aspirants and candidates. Research demonstrates that the public expects women to excel at domestic issues, but to display inexperience with international issues (Alexander and Anderson, 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn, 1996; Lawless, 2004). Elections in which domestic issues rise to the fore may thus be particularly favorable for female candidates. In contrast, election years with an international focus may disadvantage women running for political office. Specifically, domestic issues trumped international issues in the 1990s, which may have advantaged women; after 2001 an international focus on terrorism and security may have disadvantaged women.

In this paper, we theoretically and empirically explore patterns of growth in women's state legislative representation over the period 1982–2006. We begin by gleaned two longitudinal theories from the literature on women and politics that may explain women's representation over time. First, understanding patterns of women's growth in representation may require accounting for years that exhibit gender salience. Second, we may need to account for periods of time when the political climate may have aided women's election to office. We then combine the two theories to produce four possible trajectories of growth in women's state legislative representation over the period 1982 to 2006. For example, gender salience may matter but not political climate, which suggests a particular trajectory of growth over time. We evaluate each using latent growth curve models (Bollen and Curran, 2006). This method allows us to model intra-state change in women's state legislative representation as a *trajectory* of growth, covering decades of change. Finally, we use our results to speculate briefly on future growth in women's representation, for example, whether possible gender salience in the 2008 election, generated by Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, will produce a boost to women's numbers comparable to that of 1992.

Looking at states is particularly useful for our purposes. Our analysis allows the first-ever assessment of trajectories of growth in women's representation in state legislatures. Apart from any theoretical tests, therefore, we provide important descriptive information about women's overall success in achieving state legislative seats across states and over time. Second, the analysis of states allows us to isolate a test of gender salience in the Year of the Woman. Unlike at the national level, where gender salience in the 1992 election is difficult to separate from the record number of open seats, the state level did not have an increased number of open seats in that year. Finally, variation across states and time in our data allows us to test broad theories of political climate in ways that do not rely on party dominance in any one state or one year.

## 2. Explaining change in women's representation—two theories

When thinking about the Year of the Woman in historical context, research suggests two theoretical perspectives that may drive change in the representation of women in American politics over time. First, particular years may have more gender salience than other years. For example, there may be elections, such as the Year of the Woman, that raise issues of candidates' gender, subsequently producing upward “bumps” off an otherwise generally smooth growth trajectory. Second, the political climate of a particular time period may also create more or less favorable opportunities for women to win elections. Specifically, we would expect higher growth in women's representation during periods when the nation is focused on domestic issues such as health care, poverty, or the elderly. In contrast, when international issues, crime, or security are at the forefront of election issues, women may suffer in competing for office against their male opponents and exhibit slower rates of growth.

### 2.1. Gender salience in the Year of the Woman

Though there have been many notable landmarks in the history of women's political participation, the Year of the Woman stands out as an important feature of any longitudinal perspective on women's legislative representation in the U.S. Research generally describes a wide array of favorable factors that produced the dramatic increase in women's candidacy and eventual election at the national level, including a record number of open seats (Jacobson, 1992; Gaddie and Bullock, 1995; Berch, 1996; Hoffman et al., 2001), dissatisfaction with the incumbent regime (Dolan, 1998), public focus on domestic and gender-related issues (Paolino, 1995; Dolan, 1998, 2001), and anger over the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings (Jacobson, 1992; Palley and Palley, 1992; Paolino, 1995; Kim, 1998).

Importantly, this scholarship documents how, in 1992, women's under-representation in politics was problematized by the media, politicians, and the public alike (Kim, 1998). Indeed, for at least a short time, “women's absence from the halls of national elective power became the social problem that superseded all problems” (Duerst-Lahti and Versteegen, 1995, p. 213). In response, not only did an unprecedented number of qualified women run for office, but political contributions to women skyrocketed (Carroll, 1994; Berch, 1996; Cook and Wilcox, 1995). Women running for office, among other strategies, capitalized on voter opposition to the Thomas confirmation and on their position as political “outsiders” (Fox, 1997; Kim, 1998).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/956448>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/956448>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)