Exploring Gender Differences in State Legislators’ Policy Preferences

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Exploring Gender Differences in State Legislators’ Policy Preferences

SARAH POGGIONE, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

While a great deal of research documents women elected officials' more liberal policy attitudes and concludes that increased women's representation will produce more liberal policies, I argue that the influence of gender and ultimately the influence of women's representation remain unclear. First, constituency demands may explain observed gender differences. Second, the influence of gender may vary among legislators. I find that although constituency interests do have a significant effect, women continue to express significantly more liberal welfare policy preferences than men. In addition, I find that gender differences in legislators' preferences are greater among Republican and conservative legislators than among Democratic and liberal legislators. Consequently, predicting the impact of increasing women's representation on policy is likely to be more complex than previously thought.

A great deal of work on women and politics contends that women elected officials express greater interest in representing women's issues and hold more liberal policy opinions than their male colleagues because of their experiences and responsibilities in the private sphere (e.g., Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Diamond 1977; Leader 1977). Much of this work concludes that increased numbers of women elected officials will produce more liberal public policy (see e.g., Mandel and Dodson 1993; Mezey 1994; Sapiro 1981; Thomas 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991). Despite the volume of the research documenting women legislators' more liberal policy attitudes, the influence of gender on members' preferences remains unclear. Many studies of differences in men and women state legislators' policy attitudes are inconclusive because they fail to account for alternative explanations of observed gender differences, namely the effect of constituency demands. If constituency characteristics, rather than gender, explain observed gender differences in legislators' preferences then the conclusion that the election of more women to public office will produce more liberal policy may be incorrect.

In this article, I conduct a more complete test of the effect of gender on state legislators' policy preferences. Using data collected from a mail survey of state legislators, I estimate the effects of gender and constituency interests on state legislators' welfare policy attitudes. This project examines gender differences in legislators' policy preferences, rather than observable legislative behavior, because policy attitudes may provide a better estimate of the impact of gender.

In comparison, members' recorded votes on legislation, the most common dependent variable in studies of legislative behavior (see Tamerius 1995), may be the product of strategic calculations rather than a reflection of gendered attitudes. For example, if a woman legislator believes that her constituents oppose a particular bill that is unlikely to pass regardless of her vote, she may strategically decide to vote against the bill and satisfy her constituents even if she herself favors the bill. However, in other less observable legislative arenas, like the committee stage, she may actively work toward the objectives specified in the bill and the eventual passage of similar legislation. Investigating men's and women's policy preferences provides an opportunity to estimate the influence of gender outside of these strategic considerations and gain a better understanding of the effect of gender on legislators' less public legislative activities—activities that not only comprise a great deal of legislative work but also have a substantial influence on the policymaking process (see Hall 1996).

I focus on legislators' attitudes toward welfare policy because more general ideological orientations and policy priorities may mask small but significant differences in men and women's policy positions. In addition, prior work suggests that men and women legislators are likely to express different policy opinions on issues, like welfare, that affect children, women, and families in particular (Diamond 1977; Leader 1977). So if gender does have an independent influence, one would expect to observe its effect on legislators' welfare policy preferences.

Consistent with previous research, I find that women hold more liberal preferences on welfare policy than their male colleagues, even after accounting for other factors like constituency demands, party, and ideology. However, I find that gender differences in legislators' preferences are greater among Republican and conservative legislators. While Democratic and liberal women typically hold more liberal welfare policy opinions than Republican and conservative women and Democratic men; Republican and conservative women hold significantly more liberal preferences than

NOTE: A previous version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta 2000. This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the National Science Foundation (SES 9905432) and assistance from the College of Liberal Arts at the Pennsylvania State University. I would also like to thank Michael Berkman, William Bianco, Janna Deitz, and Susan Welch for their helpful comments.


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Republican and conservative men. These results suggest that the increasing presence of women in state government will produce more liberal state policies, and that increases in women's representation may have a larger, relative impact on policy where we might least expect it—when conservative and Republican women replace their male counterparts.

Explaining Gender Differences in Legislators’ Preferences

Prior research has found that women legislators, both in the states and in Congress, hold more ideologically liberal attitudes on policy than men, even after accounting for political party (e.g., Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Flamming 1997; Thomas 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991). Women legislators’ greater liberalism is evidenced in their policy positions on traditional areas of women’s interest like education, health, and welfare (Clark 1998; Diamond 1977; Leader 1977). The widely accepted explanation for gender differences in legislators’ attitudes is that women’s experiences and responsibilities in the private sphere influence their attitudes and behavior (Mandel and Dodson 1993; Mezey 1994; Tamerius 1995; Thomas 1994).

Although the gender explanation appears to be supported by gender differences in members’ policy opinions, alternate explanations for these differences cannot be dismissed. Because measures of constituency demands are either inadequate or entirely absent from these analyses, it is impossible to conclude that gender and men and women’s experiences explain observed differences in their policy attitudes. For example, Burrell (1996: 157) notes of women in Congress that, “The female members’ slightly greater liberalism during this period may be an artifact of constituency bases rather than sex: that is, women tended to be elected from districts with a more liberal political outlook, fostering a liberal voting record in accord with the ideology of their constituencies rather than an ideology emanating from their gender.”

If systematic differences in men and women’s constituencies explain the relationship between gender and legislators’ preferences, rather than gender itself, then the impact of gender may have been overestimated in previous research that excludes constituency interests. The common conclusion of these studies that the election of more women to state legislatures will alter the policies adopted by these institutions may be erroneous. On the other hand, if men and women are elected from similar types of constituencies, then constituency pressures may cause them to express similar policy attitudes. In this case, prior work that fails to include adequate measures of constituency demands may underestimate differences in men and women legislators’ policy opinions. Given the demonstrable impact of con-

stituency pressures on legislators’ decisions observed by congressional scholars (Fenno 1978; Fiorina 1974; Kingdon 1989), the omission of constituency preferences from models of gender differences in legislators’ policy attitudes suggests the need for further work.

The few studies of gender differences in legislators’ attitudes that have included measures of constituency find that these measures are related to legislators’ attitudes and may reduce the observed effect of gender (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998 and Thomas and Welch 1991). While these studies suggest that women legislators’ more liberal preferences are, in part, a product of their constituencies; given either their rough measures of constituency preferences or their failure to include relevant control variables, they do not provide rigorous tests of the independent effect of gender. While few studies of legislators’ attitudes include measures of constituency interests, several studies of gender differences in the behavior of Congress members and state legislators have included sophisticated measures of constituency characteristics (see e.g., Bratton and Haynie 1999; Swers 1998, 2002). These studies also find that constituency characteristics have a significant effect on legislators’ behavior. Given this evidence, I argue that in order to understand if gender explains why men and women’s policy preferences differ, models of gender differences in legislators’ attitudes must also include measures of constituents’ preferences and relevant control variables.

Modeling Legislator’s Preferences

I model legislators’ welfare policy attitudes as a function of gender, constituency preferences, and relevant control variables. Previous studies suggest that party, ideology, and sociodemographic characteristics like age, socioeconomic status, race, and religion are important control variables to include in models of legislators’ preferences (Barnello 1999; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994; Thomas 1994; and Thomas and Welch 1991). Given that many of these characteristics are not only related to legislators’ attitudes but may also be correlated with gender and constituency preferences, the independent variables of interest, including these factors as control variables insure that the key relationships are estimated correctly.

Using data collected from a mail survey of more than 2,500 legislators in 24 states as well as information from state legislative web pages, I evaluate the independent effect of gender on state legislators’ welfare policy preferences. 

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1 Research also finds significant gender differences in legislative behavior (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Dodson 1991; Dolan 1997; Frankovic 1977; Leader 1977; Swers 1998, 2002; Tamerius 1995; Thomas 1991; and Thomas and Welch 1991; Vega and Firestone 1995; Welch 1985).

2 Thomas and Welch’s (1991) measure, district urbanization, may be an inadequate measure of constituency opinion. The measure of district urbanization used in this analysis is not highly correlated with either demographic or subjective measures of constituency preferences. Although Carey, Niemi, and Powell (1998) include adequate measures of constituency characteristics, they do not control for the legislators’ personal attributes like education and age. Given that these characteristics may be correlated with gender and policy preferences, their exclusion may produce biased estimates of the impact of gender.
The survey, conducted in 2000, was mailed to 2,526 state legislators, all members of the lower houses of 24 selected state legislatures. After three separate mailings, 530 legislators responded to the survey, including 407 men and 123 women, producing an overall response rate of about 21 percent and a response rate of 21 percent for both men and women. The response rate varied considerably among states from a low of 8 percent in Texas and Illinois to a high of 39 percent in Nebraska.

The overall response rate of the survey is lower than those reported by other studies of state legislators; however, many other studies of gender and state legislators rely on interviews or data collected on members in a single state or a few states (Flammang 1985; Kathlene 1995; Reingold 2000; Saint-Germain 1989). While these studies make significant scholarly contributions, it may be inaccurate to generalize from these studies of fewer legislatures to the larger population of state legislators. In order to confirm that gender differences exist among the larger population of state legislators and not just within a particular set of legislatures, it is important to collect data from legislators in a large number of different types of states. The 24 state legislatures selected for this study vary by region, state legislative professionalism, percent of women in the legislature, and party control of the chamber. This insures that the results do not apply to only one particular legislature or a particular type of legislature (e.g., only professional legislatures). More importantly for this study, collecting data from a large number of states insures variation in legislators’ partisan backgrounds, personal characteristics, and constituency interests and provides for a more rigorous test of the gender hypothesis.

Despite the relatively large number of legislators in the study and the large number of states included in the sample, the low response rate may be problematic. If certain types of respondents are less likely to participate in a survey, then survey nonresponse can introduce selection bias into even a random sample and ultimately threaten the inferential value of the empirical analysis (see Groves, Cialdini, and Couper 1992). In order to test and correct for possible selection bias resulting from the low response rate, I use a Heckman selection model (see Sherman 2000 for a discussion of Heckman models in survey data). The Heckman model I employ uses full information maximum likelihood to simultaneously estimate a system of two equations. The first equation, the selection equation, predicts the probability that a member of the sample responded to the survey and is included in the second equation. The second equation, the substantive regression equation of interest, predicts state legislators’ welfare policy liberalism. This procedure corrects for selectivity bias and produces consistent, asymptotically efficient parameter estimates (see Greene 1993; Heckman 1979). Consequently, the coefficients of the Heckman model can be interpreted as though the dependent variable was observed for the complete sample, in other words, as though all legislators had responded to survey.6

Measuring Welfare Policy Preferences

To measure the dependent variable, I develop a summative index of welfare policy liberalism composed of 17 dichotomous items indicating legislators’ support or opposition to principles of welfare reform and initiatives designed to help recipients or populations at risk. Table 1 lists the 17 items and their correlations with the index computed without the item. Consistent with the requirements of summative scales all 17 items are positively correlated with one another as well with the index computed without the item; this, combined with the large and significant coefficient of reliability for the scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$), indicates that the items do reflect the underlying dimension, welfare policy liberalism.7 The welfare policy liberalism index ranges from zero, indicating the most conservative position on welfare policy, to 17, indicating the most liberal position. The mean score for all respondents is 9.13. The mean score for male legislators is 8.44, and the mean for women is 11.46, suggesting that women do appear to hold more liberal preferences than their male colleagues. A difference in means test reveals that this three point gender difference is statistically significant ($t = 8.56$, $p = .000$). However, in order to determine if women’s greater welfare policy liberalism is a product of gender rather than differences in their constituencies or other characteristics, a multivariate test is necessary.

Independent Variables

In this analysis, gender is coded 1 for women and 0 for men. Other sociodemographic variables including age,

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6 The Heckman model assumes the following underlying regression relationship: $\gamma_{ij} = x_{i} \beta + u_{ij}$. However, $\gamma_{ij}$ is only observed if $e_{i} + u_{ij} > 0$ where $u_{ij} \sim N(0, \sigma), u_{ij} \sim N(0, 1)$ and $\text{corr}(u_{i}, u_{j}) = \rho$. When $\rho \neq 0$ OLS will produce biased estimates of $\beta$. The Heckman selection procedure produces consistent, asymptotically efficient estimates of $\beta$ that represent the marginal effects of the independent variables in the underlying regression equation (see Heckman 1979).

7 Summative scaling assumes that the items and the sum of the item trace lines are monotonically related to the underlying dimension and that all items are related to a single common factor (McIver and Carmines 1981). If these assumptions are met, then a summative scale of ordinal or dichotomous items is an interval level measure of the underlying dimension (see Jacoby 1991). The positive inter-item and corrected scale and item correlations as well as a factor analysis in which all 17 items load highly on a single common factor demonstrate that these conditions are satisfied and that the resulting scale is an interval-level measure. The resulting summative rating scale correlates highly ($r = .97$) with the factor measure.
marital status, religion, and socioeconomic status were primarily obtained from the official web sites of state legislatures, members' own web sites, and the Project Vote Smart database of state legislators. Marital status is measured using a set of dichotomous variables indicating whether or not legislators are divorced, single, or widowed. Religion is measured using a set of four dichotomous variables: Catholic, Jewish, non-traditional Christian, and no religious preference. Married and Protestant are the omitted categories. Socioeconomic status is coded if the member has obtained a college degree and 0 otherwise. Race, coded 1 for black legislators and 0 otherwise, was obtained from the National Black Caucus of State Legislators' NBCSL Legislative Directory and the Joint Center for Political Economic Studies' Black Elected Officials: A Statistical Summary, 2000.

I employ several measures of constituency preferences in this analysis including demographic variables and legislators' subjective assessments of their constituents' concerns. Based on the measures employed in previous studies (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Thomas and Welch 1991), I use average household income in state house districts (in thousands of dollars), the percent unemployed in the district, the percent of the district having earned a college degree as well as a dichotomous measure of district urbaneness to measure constituents' welfare policy preferences. District welfare liberalism, a subjective measure of constituency opinion obtained from the survey, has five categories ranging from 0 (very conservative) to 4 (very liberal).

Legislator party is measured using two dichotomous variables indicating if the legislator is a member of a Democratic or Progressive party and if the legislator is a member of third party or is unaffiliated with any party. Being a Republican or Independent Republican is the excluded category. The measure of legislator's ideology was obtained from the survey; based on a question from a similar study (Welch and Peters 1977), I ask legislators to place themselves on a five-point scale that ranges from 0 (very conservative) to 4 (very liberal).

**Selection Equation Variables**

Literature on survey nonresponse suggests that sociodemographic characteristics like age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status are important predictors of the decision to participate in a survey (see e.g., DeMaio 1980; Smith 1983). In addition to these general characteristics, the professionalism of the legislature and members' legislative seniority may also influence the likelihood that legislators will participate in a survey. I expect that members who serve in more professional legislatures-institutions that generally have higher workloads and meet for longer sessions—may be less likely to complete the survey given the numerous demands on their time (see Squire 1992). More senior members may also be less likely to participate given that they are more involved in...
the decisions made in their legislatures. In addition, party may also affect the decisions of members to participate in the survey. The survey's focus on welfare policy may interest Democratic legislators more than their Republican colleagues, and Democrats may be more likely to respond. Consequently I model the decision to participate in the survey as a function of age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, the professionalism of the legislature, legislative seniority, and party.

Table 2 presents the results of the Heckman selection model. First, consider the selection model. Note that age, education, and race have significant effects on the probability that a legislator responds to the survey. Older and more educated respondents are more likely to participate in the survey, and black legislators are less likely to do so. In addition, the Heckman model parameters indicate that the selection model is useful and appropriate in this situation. The estimate of \( \rho \), the correlation of the error terms of the selection equation and substantive regression equation, is quite large (\( \rho = .72 \)), which indicates that the error terms of the two equations are related and that ordinary least squares (OLS) would produce biased parameter estimates. The Wald test of independent equations, which tests the significance of \( \rho \), the \( \chi^2(\rho = 0) \) statistic, is large enough (\( \chi^2 = 21.38, p = .000 \)) to reject the null hypothesis that \( \rho \) equals 0 and that the two equations are independent. Based on the performance of the Heckman model and the possibility of drawing inaccurate inferences concerning the effects of key independent variables from OLS results, I report Heckman selection model results for this analysis.

### The Independent Effect of Gender

Table 3 presents the Heckman model results using three different measures of constituency preferences including demographic measures, legislators' subjective assessments

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Table 2: Heckman Model of Legislators' Attitudes on Welfare Policy Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welfare Policy Index</th>
<th>Selection Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District income</td>
<td>-.01 (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District education</td>
<td>.03* (.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District unemployment</td>
<td>.04 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.45 (.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (female)</td>
<td>1.25*** (.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalism</td>
<td>1.52*** (.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>.61 (.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>.55 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>-.63 (.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>1.80*** (.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other party</td>
<td>.91 (1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (black legislator)</td>
<td>-1.05 (0.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>.29 (.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>.61 (.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional Christian</td>
<td>.25 (1.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religious preference</td>
<td>.42 (.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State legislative professionalism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in legislature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(constant)</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncensored observations</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total observations</td>
<td>2198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \rho )</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \chi^2(\rho = 0) )</td>
<td>21.38***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \chi^2 )</td>
<td>889.95***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Robust standard errors in parentheses (corrected for clustering on states).

* \( p < .05 \), ** \( p < .01 \), *** \( p < .001 \)
Table 3
The Effects of Gender and Constituency on Welfare Policy Liberalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.01)</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.01)</td>
<td>-0.01 (1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District income</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District education</td>
<td>0.03* (0.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District unemployment</td>
<td>0.04 (0.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District welfare liberalism</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.50** (0.17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban district</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.59** (0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.45 (0.40)</td>
<td>0.47 (0.37)</td>
<td>0.51 (0.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (female)</td>
<td>1.25*** (0.38)</td>
<td>1.29*** (0.36)</td>
<td>1.28*** (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalism</td>
<td>1.52*** (0.21)</td>
<td>1.47*** (0.22)</td>
<td>1.60*** (0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0.61 (0.50)</td>
<td>0.80 (0.47)</td>
<td>0.59 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0.55 (0.69)</td>
<td>0.49 (0.70)</td>
<td>0.30 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>-0.63 (0.68)</td>
<td>-0.53 (0.77)</td>
<td>-0.73 (0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>1.80*** (0.53)</td>
<td>1.61** (0.56)</td>
<td>1.64** (0.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other party</td>
<td>0.91 (1.24)</td>
<td>0.86 (1.17)</td>
<td>0.81 (1.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (black legislator)</td>
<td>-1.05 (0.88)</td>
<td>-1.08 (0.84)</td>
<td>-1.39 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.29 (0.30)</td>
<td>0.21 (0.31)</td>
<td>0.30 (0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0.61 (0.69)</td>
<td>0.42 (0.72)</td>
<td>0.73 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional Christian</td>
<td>0.25 (1.38)</td>
<td>0.17 (1.27)</td>
<td>0.29 (1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religious preference</td>
<td>0.42 (0.27)</td>
<td>0.37 (0.28)</td>
<td>0.47 (0.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(constant)</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncensored observations</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total observations</td>
<td>2198</td>
<td>2198</td>
<td>2198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p$</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2 (p = 0)$</td>
<td>21.38***</td>
<td>18.37***</td>
<td>19.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>889.95***</td>
<td>990.96***</td>
<td>879.47***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Heckman model coefficients with robust standard errors corrected for clustering on states in parentheses.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

of their constituents' liberalism on welfare, and the district urbaness measure. Given that the selection equations for all three specifications are nearly identical to the results reported in Table 2, I report only the results of the substantive equations predicting state legislators' welfare policy liberalism. All three analyses utilize robust standard errors corrected for clustering on states to allow for the fact that observations may be correlated within states. Across all three models gender exerts a significant and positive effect. Women legislators do have more liberal preferences on welfare policy than their male counterparts. Notice that even after controlling for party, ideology, and various measures of constituency concerns, gender has a substantial impact on members' welfare policy attitudes. According to Model 1, women legislators score about 1.25 points higher on the index of welfare policy liberalism than men, even after accounting for the effects of party, ideology, constituency, and personal characteristics. Models 2 and 3 estimate similar effects for gender. In order to put the effect of gender in context, it may be useful to compare it to the effect of party. Democratic legislators score between 1.61 and 1.80 points higher on the welfare liberalism scale than Republicans. In comparison then, gender differences are statistically and substantively significant in all three models and just slightly smaller in magnitude than partisan differences.

In each model, the measures of constituency preferences have a significant impact on legislators' welfare policy liberalism. Legislators whose constituencies have a greater percentage of college graduates, who assess their constituencies as more liberal regarding welfare policy, and who have urban constituencies, are more likely to hold liberal preferences on welfare policy. This demonstrates that constituency concerns do influence legislators' attitudes, and more importantly, that gender continues to influence legislators' policy preferences despite the inclusion of several different measures of constituency opinions. Liberalism and political party (Democrat) exert significant, positive effects on legislators' welfare policy liberalism as expected. Although the coefficients for age and education are in the predicted directions, they fail to achieve statistical

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9 There are 2,198 censored cases. Although 2,526 legislators were included in the sample, information used in the selection model could only be obtained for 2,198 legislators. While about 530 legislators responded to the survey, information on the dependent variable was unavailable for about 30 respondents. In addition, several other independent variables could not be obtained for all legislators resulting in about 416 uncensored cases.
significance in all three specifications of the model. The coefficient for race is negative but not statistically significant. Given the small number of black legislators in the analysis, this research is not a reliable test of the effect of race on state legislators' welfare policy attitudes; however, the inclusion of race does provide for a more stringent test of the effect of gender. None of the religious categories achieves significance in any of the specifications, and joint tests of significance find that the religion variables collectively fail to contribute additional explanatory power to the models (e.g., for model 1, χ² = 2.72, p = .61). While none of the individual coefficients for the three measures of marital status are statistically significant, a joint test shows that marital status does contribute additional explanatory power to the models (e.g., for model 1, χ² = 10.32, p = .02).

**CONDITIONING THE EFFECT OF GENDER**

The results of this analysis confirm that gender does exert an independent impact on legislators' policy opinions, even after accounting for constituency concerns, party, ideology, and other characteristics; however, the relationship between gender and members' policy opinions may be more complex. As previous work suggests substantial differences exist among women legislators (e.g., Dolan and Ford 1998), especially in terms of party and ideology. Consequently, I examine the interactive effects of party and ideology with gender. Table 4 presents the effect of gender on welfare policy liberalism including these interactions; the high correlation of the two interaction terms (r = .88) precludes estimating their effects in one model.10

The results of Model 1 indicate that the effect of gender is significantly conditioned by party. The effect of gender, as in the previous models, is positive and significant. However,

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10 The gender-ideology interaction is correlated at .87 with gender and .40 with ideology. The gender-party interaction is correlated at .72 with gender and .39 with party. In order to establish that the findings regarding the conditional effect of gender are not a product of multicollinearity, I create interaction terms from standardized measures of gender, ideology, and party. The interaction of standardized gender and ideology is correlated with gender at .35 and with ideology at .17. The interaction of standardized gender and party is correlated with gender at .00 and at .11 with party. Using these new interaction terms, I re-estimated the models from Table 4. The results of this analysis produced nearly identical results to those presented in Table 4. In both models, the interaction terms are negative and statistically significant and the component variables are positive and significant. This suggests that the conditional effects of gender presented in Table 4 are not products of multicollinearity.
the significant and negative coefficient of the interaction of gender and Democratic party demonstrates that gender differences are less pronounced among Democratic legislators and more pronounced among Republicans. Because the effect of gender can no longer be interpreted independently, it may be helpful to consider predicted scores on the index of welfare policy liberalism for average male and female Democrats and Republicans.

Using the regression coefficients in the first column of Table 4 and the mean, median, or modal categories of the other independent variables, I computed the welfare liberalism scores of an average Democratic and Republican woman and an average Democratic and Republican man. The average Democratic woman has the most liberal preferences on welfare policy of all average legislators, scoring a 7.2 on the index. The average Republican woman scores 6.9 on the scale, only slightly less liberal in her welfare policy opinions than her female Democratic colleague. The average Democratic man has a score of 6.6 on the index, slightly less liberal than either the average Democratic or Republican woman. In contrast, the average Republican man holds significantly less liberal preferences on welfare as indicated by the score of 4.5 on the index. While only a modest gender difference exists between the welfare policy attitudes of average men and women Democratic legislators (.6 points), gender differences are much more pronounced among Republicans (2.4 points). Regardless of party, women are more liberal in their opinions on welfare policy than men, especially Republican men. This finding is consistent with prior work that finds that Republican women are more likely to defect from their party and cast liberal votes, introduce bills, and act in other ways that do not reflect their party's more conservative agenda (see e.g., Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Wolbrecht 2000).

Model 2 in Table 4 demonstrates that ideology also significantly conditions the effect of gender. Similar to the results for party and its interaction with gender, the significant and negative coefficient of the interaction of gender and liberalism demonstrates that gender differences are less pronounced among liberal legislators and more pronounced among conservatives. Figure 1 graphs the average male and female legislator's predicted scores on the index of welfare policy liberalism for the range of all possible ideological values. For most values of ideology, the average woman exhibits more liberal preferences on welfare than the average man. At the lowest values of ideology, the conservative end of the spectrum, gender differences are most pronounced and women on average hold considerably more liberal preferences than men. For higher values of ideology, both men and women express more liberal preferences on welfare and the differences between the average man and woman's score narrows. For the highest value of ideology, the most liberal end of the spectrum, the average male legislator's score is just slightly higher or more liberal than that of the average woman; however this difference is quite small. For the most part women hold more liberal policy attitudes on welfare than men, and these gender differences are more pronounced among conservatives. Conservative women are actually far less conservative with respect to welfare policy than their male counterparts.
CONCLUSION

Consistent with previous work on women elected officials, I find that women state legislators do, in fact, hold more liberal preferences on welfare policy than men, even after accounting for numerous measures of constituency demands, party, ideology, and other characteristics. While both men and women legislators respond to their constituents, women legislators hold significantly more liberal opinions on welfare than men. I also find that gender differences are greater among Republican and conservative legislators.

Although these results are consistent with the expectation that the increasing presence of women in elected office will produce more liberal policy, the policy impact of women legislators is mediated by legislative institutions and women’s positions within them (see Berkman and O’Connor 1993; Dodson 1998; Norton 1995, 2002; Reingold 2000; Rosenthal 1998; Saint-Germain 1989; Swers 2002; Thomas 1994). In addition, constituency demands may constrain some legislators, particularly women representing conservative districts, especially in terms of roll call voting and other easily observed activities. However, women legislators may have the opportunity to influence policy in less public venues. For example, the decision to take part and be actively involved in the deliberation on a given bill, especially at the committee stage, affords motivated legislators an opportunity to influence policy that is not easily observed by the public and may be less structured by constituency demands (see Hall 1996, 1987; Hall and Wayman 1990). Given that women are more active on welfare issues and more likely to serve on welfare related committees (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Dodson 1991; Dolan and Ford 1998; Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1994, 1991; Thomas and Welch 1991), women legislators may be able to act on their more liberal welfare policy preferences and influence policy despite their position in the institution and even when they represent conservative constituencies.

While this research specifically addresses the issue of welfare, it may have implications for other policy areas. This work demonstrates that men and women legislators’ policy preferences differ for welfare, a highly partisan issue. If gender exerts such a strong effect in this policy area, then gender may have a significant influence on other policy areas, especially areas in which the parties have less defined positions. In fact, many scholars argue that women will express distinctive preferences on a number of policy issues. For example, Carroll (1990: 11) argues, “Regardless of whether the issue is foreign aid, the budget, or the environment, women are more likely than men to consider the possible impact of the policy on the lives of women and children.” Given the strong influence of gender evidenced in this and other studies and the expectation that gender is likely to influence other policy areas, understanding how gender structures legislators’ attitudes and behavior is vital to understanding legislative decisionmaking and representation.

REFERENCES


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