

Candidate Recruitment and Women's Election to the State Legislatures¹

Kira Sanbonmatsu
Department of Political Science
The Ohio State University

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Previous studies have identified important explanations for women's underrepresentation in elective office, including the barriers of incumbency and the social eligibility pool. However, these studies only partially explain why men continue to outnumber women as candidates. Few scholars have examined the processes of candidate emergence and recruitment to consider how the preprimary phase may affect women's election to office.

I propose that the recruitment practices of the major political parties can help to explain the pattern of where women run for and hold state legislative office. In this report, I compare women's candidacies across three states in order to shed light on who runs for the legislature under different conditions. I examine the candidate recruitment activities of the Democratic and Republican parties in three states: Alabama, Iowa, and Massachusetts.

I find that the extent to which the parties are involved in recruiting candidates varies across states. The parties are most active in candidate recruitment in Iowa. Meanwhile, of the three states and two parties, the Democratic party in Massachusetts is the least active. Recruitment does not necessarily imply gatekeeping, however, as the parties are typically neutral in the primary. According to party leaders and staff, candidate gender is not central to candidate recruitment. However, beliefs about women's electability vary across states, with some respondents arguing that some voters are reluctant to vote for a woman. In Alabama and Iowa, but not Massachusetts, women are believed to have a better chance of being elected in some parts of the state than others. These beliefs are likely to shape who is tapped to run for the legislature. Even where the parties are not actively recruiting candidates, party leader beliefs about the viability of women candidates may affect the emergence of women candidates because candidates are less likely to run if they think they cannot win.

I begin by discussing past studies of women candidates. I also provide background information about the states included in this study. I then analyze the results of interviews I conducted with party leaders and staff. I conclude by discussing the implications of this study for women candidates and for future research. Because this report is part of a larger, ongoing research project, the findings presented here should be considered preliminary.

Existing Literature

Past research on women's underrepresentation has primarily emphasized two barriers to increasing the numbers of women in elective office: incumbency and the social eligibility pool. Because most incumbents are male and incumbents typically win reelection, incumbency is considered to be the greatest barrier to increasing women's descriptive representation (Burrell 1994; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). Therefore, the greatest gains for women are likely to occur through contests for open seats (Burrell 1994). In addition to the structural barrier of incumbency, women are less likely to be employed in professions that tend to lead to running for office, such as business and law—partly because women were historically barred from those professions (Thomas 1994; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). However, women legislators are more likely to come from these backgrounds now than in the past (Dolan and Ford 1997). And as more women are elected and appointed to local offices, they in turn become part of the eligible pool of candidates for state and federal office.

Thus, the expectations of previous studies are that (1) women candidates should benefit from the enactment of term limits because term limits create more open seats, and (2) the number of women in office should naturally increase over time as women become more integrated into the professions and women at lower levels of political office move up the political ladder. Past

studies have largely ruled out voter bias as an explanation for women's underrepresentation because women and men tend to win their races at similar rates, controlling for the type of race (e.g., Darcy and Schramm 1977; Burrell 1994; Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997).

Both incumbency and the social eligibility pool continue to be the leading factors that help explain women's underrepresentation today. However, the growth in the percentage of women legislators has been slower than scholars anticipated. After increasing for three decades, the percentage of women in state legislatures appears to have leveled off at about 22% (Carroll and Jenkins 2001; CAWP 2003). As Carroll and Jenkins (2001) recently argued, the lack of an increase in women's presence in the state legislatures despite the adoption of term limits, and the apparent plateau in the percentage of women state legislators, demonstrate the limitations of existing explanations for women's underrepresentation. It appears that our understanding of why more women do not seek office is incomplete. Incumbency continues to be an obstacle to women's representation, but it cannot explain why more women do not run for open seats.² Meanwhile, the social eligibility pool can better explain why men outnumber women in open seat contests. However, because only half of state legislators have held prior elective office, the eligibility pool can only be a partial explanation.³ In addition, women may come to office through occupations and backgrounds that are somewhat different from those of men (Carroll and Strimling 1983; Burrell 1994; Thomas 1994).

² New approaches are being used in order to understand how gender may affect the decision to run at the individual level. For example, the National Women's Political Caucus (1994) conducted a pilot of study of men and women attorneys and executives and women activists. In a study with a similar research design, Fox, Lawless, and Feeley (2001) sampled potential candidates in the state of New York by surveying lawyers, business executives, educators, legislative staff, and lobbyists and heads of interest groups.

³ This statistic is from a recent survey of state legislators (Pew Center on the States 2003). Nearly 60% of state legislators in the study did not hold elective office prior to serving in the legislature.

Studies of women's representation have generally overlooked the role of political parties. Yet parties may partially explain the puzzle of why more women do not run for office. Because past scholars have suggested that women candidates stand to benefit from stronger party organizations and greater party influence over the nomination, the role of the parties in shaping who runs for the legislature may be important to understanding women's underrepresentation. Strong party organizations may facilitate women's candidacies because party leaders may recruit women who might not run for office otherwise. If there is a shortage of candidates, perhaps because the party is in the minority or because legislative service is time consuming but low paying, the party may need to recruit candidates. Party recruitment may be particularly helpful to women because women candidates may need more encouragement to run (Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001; Fox, Lawless, and Feeley 2001; National Women's Political Caucus 1994). Women candidates are also more likely than men to report that they were recruited (Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001).

Other studies have reached more negative conclusions about parties and women's representation. Strong party organizations typically have a negative effect on women's presence in the state legislature (Nelson 1991; Werner 1993; Sanbonmatsu 2002). In addition, most locally elected women in Niven's (1998) study of four states reported that party leaders discouraged potential women candidates from running for office. Other research has found that women are slated to run as sacrificial lambs in difficult races (Carroll and Strimling 1983; Carroll 1994). Thus party gatekeeping and candidate recruitment may not facilitate women's candidacies.

Background: Alabama, Iowa, and Massachusetts

Part of the reason we do not know how party practices affect women's candidacies is that we have very little systematic research on the candidate recruitment process across states.⁴ In order to gain insight into how candidate recruitment affects women's candidacies, I conducted interviews in Alabama, Iowa, and Massachusetts in 2001 and 2002 about party practices, party strategies, and the status of women candidates in each state. This report is part of a larger project on women's election to the legislatures that includes case studies of several other states.⁵

In choosing these states, I primarily sought variation across the cases on two dimensions: partisan composition and legislative professionalism (Sanbonmatsu 2002). Competition and the attractiveness of the office should explain the extent to which party leaders recruit candidates. Because the cases represent different combinations of partisan composition and professionalism, they should capture a range of party recruitment practices. These states also vary in region, ideology, political culture, and social diversity.

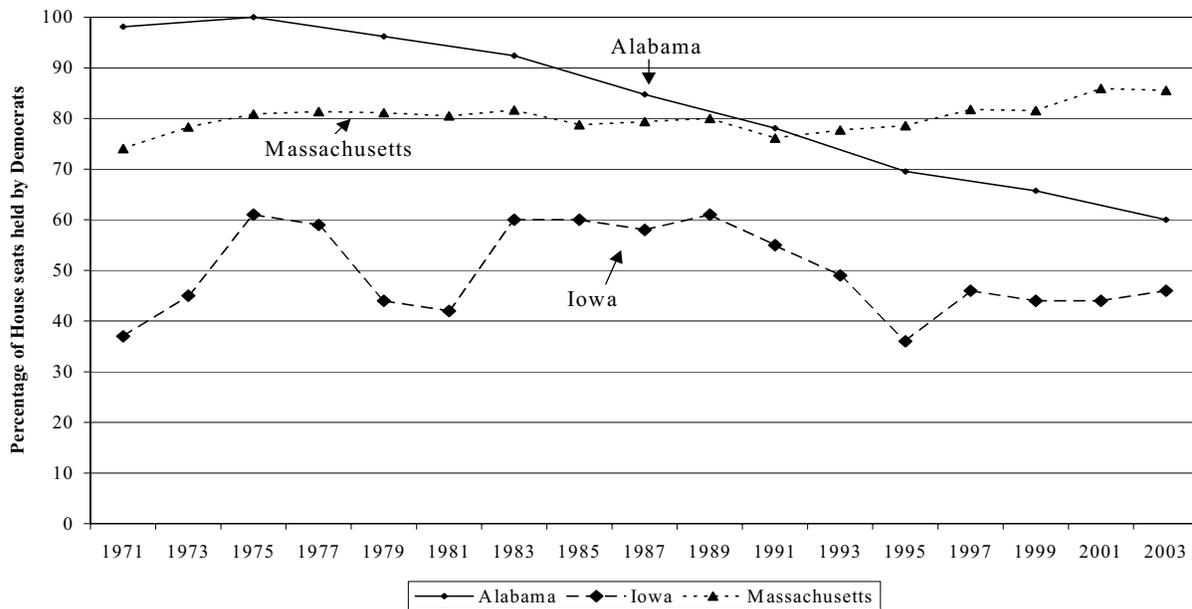
These states have different levels of party competition, as is evident in Figure 1, which charts the Democratic share of house seats held by the two major parties over time. Figure 2 examines the state senate. The Massachusetts state legislature is overwhelmingly Democratic and has been for nearly four decades (see Table 1). In Alabama, the Republican party has become much more competitive. To date, Republican gains have mostly taken place in statewide and federal races; Democrats continue to control both chambers of the legislature. In Iowa, the Republican party controls both chambers. Republicans took control of the house in 1992 and the

⁴ Though see Appleton and Ward (1997) for valuable information on party practices in each state. Jewell (1984) examines the nomination process, though his focus is on governors. Studies of party organizational strength also shed light on the extent of candidate recruitment for state legislative races across states, although that is not the main goal of these studies (e.g., Cotter et al. 1984).

⁵ I conducted interviews in Ohio, North Carolina, and Colorado in 2001. I also attended the CAWP 2001 Forum for Women State Legislators in Dana Point, California. There, I interviewed women from these additional states:

senate in 1996. Iowa typically has the most two-party contests in house races (70%), followed by Massachusetts (42%) and Alabama (36%) (Jewell and Morehouse 2001).⁶ In 2002, 62% of house seats in Iowa were contested by the two major parties, compared with 50% in Alabama and 31% in Massachusetts. In Bibby and Holbrook's (1999) recent calculation of the Ranney index, which assesses the extent of party competition in the states using recent gubernatorial and state legislative election results, all three states were classified as states with two-party competition, as opposed to one-party states.

Figure 1
Democratic Share of House



California, Georgia, Maine, New Hampshire, Washington. I conducted a total of over 240 interviews, including those discussed in this report.

⁶ These statistics are for house races from 1984 to 1994.

Figure 2
Democratic Share of Senate

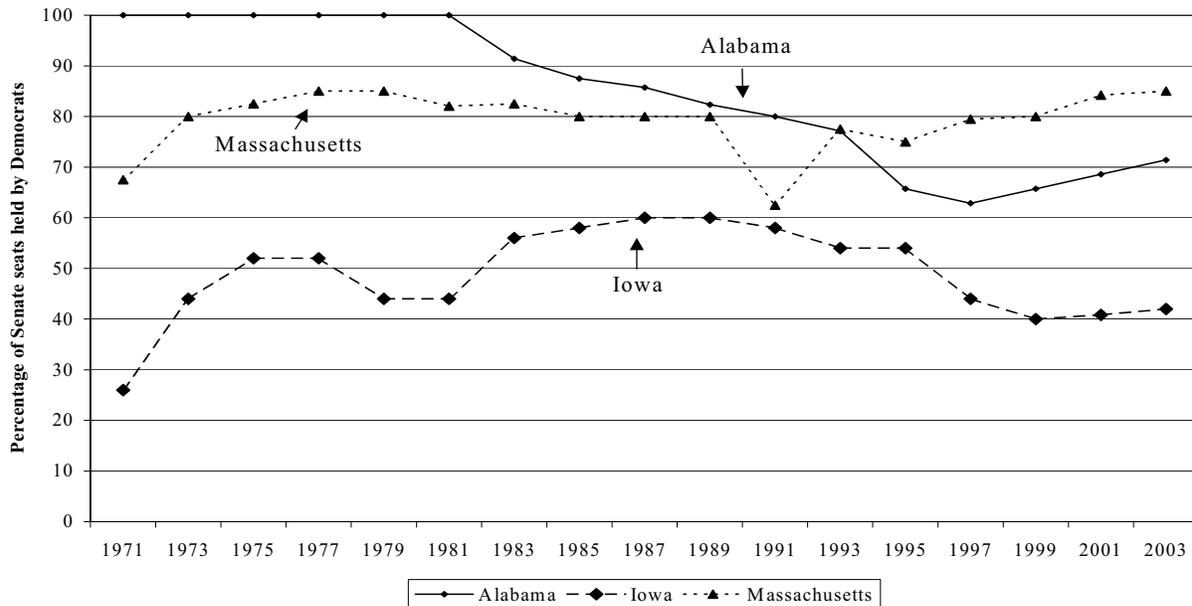


Table 1. Case Studies

	Alabama	Iowa	Massachusetts
% Democratic share of state house	60	46	85
% Democratic share of state senate	71	42	85
Base salary	\$10/day	\$20,758/year	\$53,380/year

Data are for 2003 from the National Conference of State Legislatures <www.ncsl.org>.

The nature of service in the legislature varies across these states as well. By law, the Alabama Legislature can only meet for 30 days over 105 calendar days.⁷ The legislature in Iowa typically meets from January through late April. In contrast, the Massachusetts General Court,

⁷ In the first year of the quadrennium, or four year period, the session begins in early March, whereas the session begins in early February in the second and third years, and early January in the fourth year. Both house and senate members serve four-year terms.

as the legislature is known, meets virtually year-round and is considered one of the most professionalized legislatures in the country. The Iowa General Assembly is typically classified as a hybrid legislature, whereas the Alabama Legislature is a less professionalized, citizen legislature, given its base salary (see Table 1). In addition to base salary, legislators receive additional compensation to cover expenses.⁸

These states also vary in terms of party organizational strength, measured by the extent to which the state party has an enduring headquarters and is actively involved in pursuing electoral goals (Gibson et al. 1983). Cotter et al. (1984) classified the state Republican parties as strong or moderately strong in Iowa and Alabama, whereas the Massachusetts Republicans were classified as weak. The state Democratic parties in Massachusetts and Iowa were considered moderately weak. In terms of local party organizational strength, Iowa has typically had stronger organizations than Massachusetts or Alabama (Cotter et al. 1984). Typical one-party dominance in Massachusetts has translated into weak party organizations (Mileur 1997). Meanwhile, the parties in Alabama have become much more competitive, and the organizational strength of the Republican party has increased significantly in recent years (Cotter 1997). None of these states is considered a traditional party organization state in Mayhew's (1986) classification, meaning that the parties have not historically exercised significant influence over the nomination or relied on patronage.

At the time of my interviews, Massachusetts ranked 18th in the nation for women's representation, in the second quartile of all states (see Table 2). Iowa was in the third quartile at 27th, and Alabama was in the fourth quartile, ranked 50th of all states.

⁸ In Alabama, legislators receive an additional \$2,280 per month plus \$50/day, three days a week during the session. In Iowa, legislators receive an additional \$86/day. Massachusetts legislators can be reimbursed \$10-\$100/day, depending on how far they live from the capitol. Data are from the National Conference of State Legislatures <<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legman/03Table-legcomp.htm>>.

Table 2. Women State Legislators, 2002

	Alabama	Iowa	Massachusetts
% women state legislators	8	22	26
% Democratic women state legislators	9	23	26
% Republican women state legislators	6	21	29
State Ranking, % women state legislators	50	27	18

Data are from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) (2002).

Women's representation in all three states has increased since the early 1970s, as it has across the country (Cox 1996). A closer look at women's presence in the lower house of the legislature illustrates the change over time in women's representation. The next figures plot women's presence within each caucus in the house over time. Few women serve in either party's caucus in the lower chamber of the Alabama legislature (see Figure 3).⁹ Figure 4 shows that though the parties have had similar records in Iowa, women currently constitute a greater share of the Democratic caucus than the Republican caucus. In Massachusetts, however, women have usually constituted a larger share of the Republican caucus than the Democratic caucus (see Figure 5).

⁹ Note that the 25% value for Republican women in Alabama in Figure 3 represents the presence of one woman among a total of only four Republicans serving in the house that year. Data are from CAWP <<http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts4.html>>.

Figure 3
Women in the Alabama House

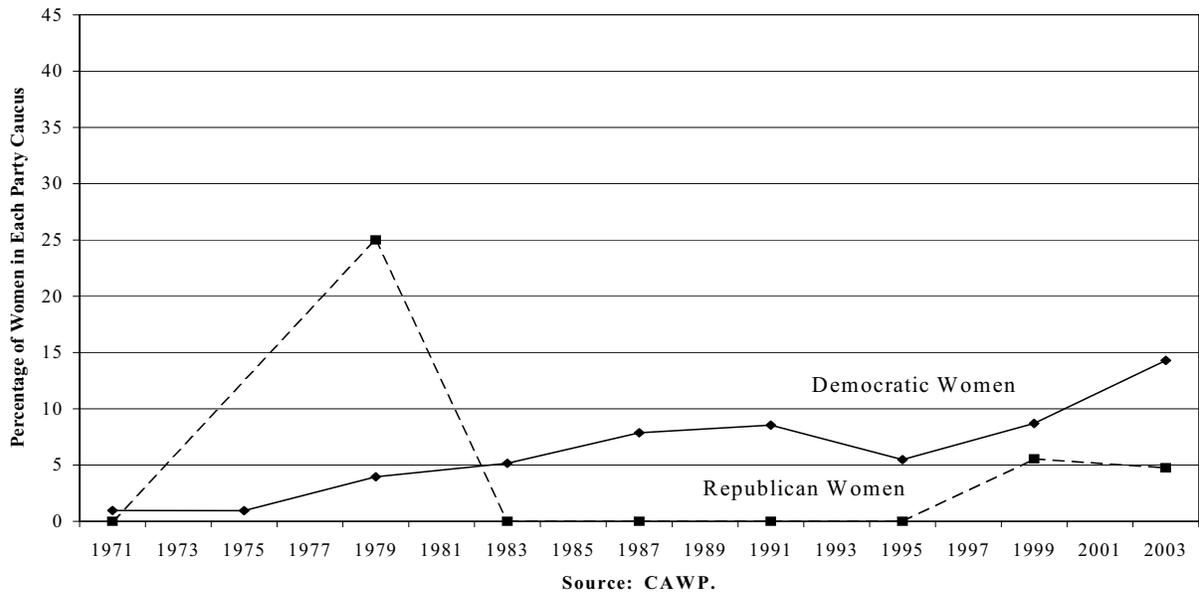


Figure 4
Women in the Iowa House

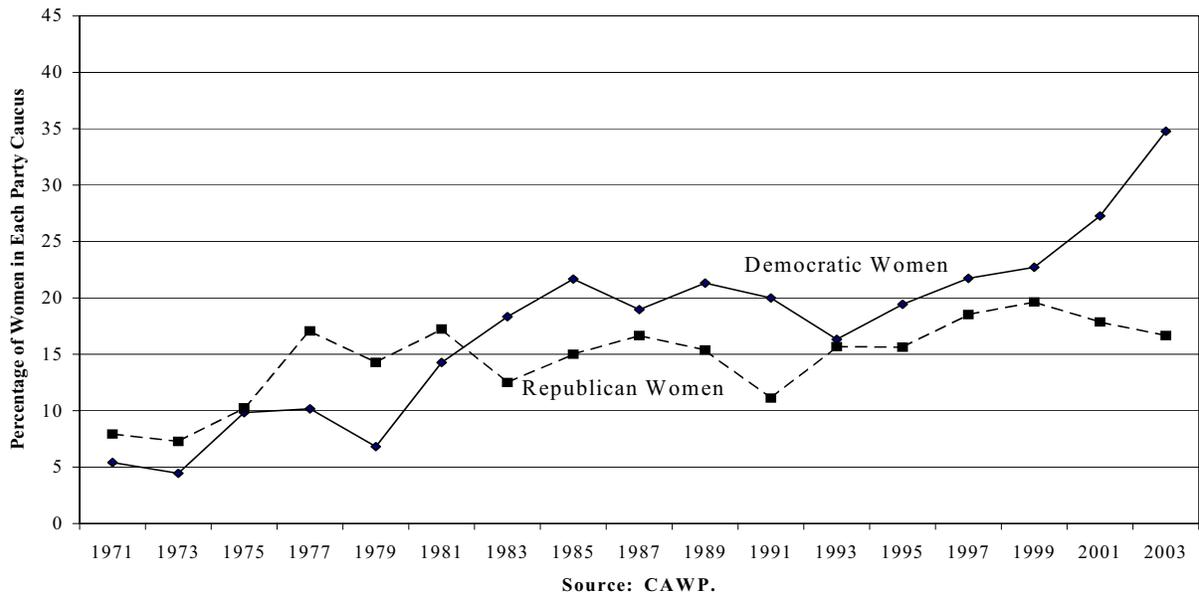
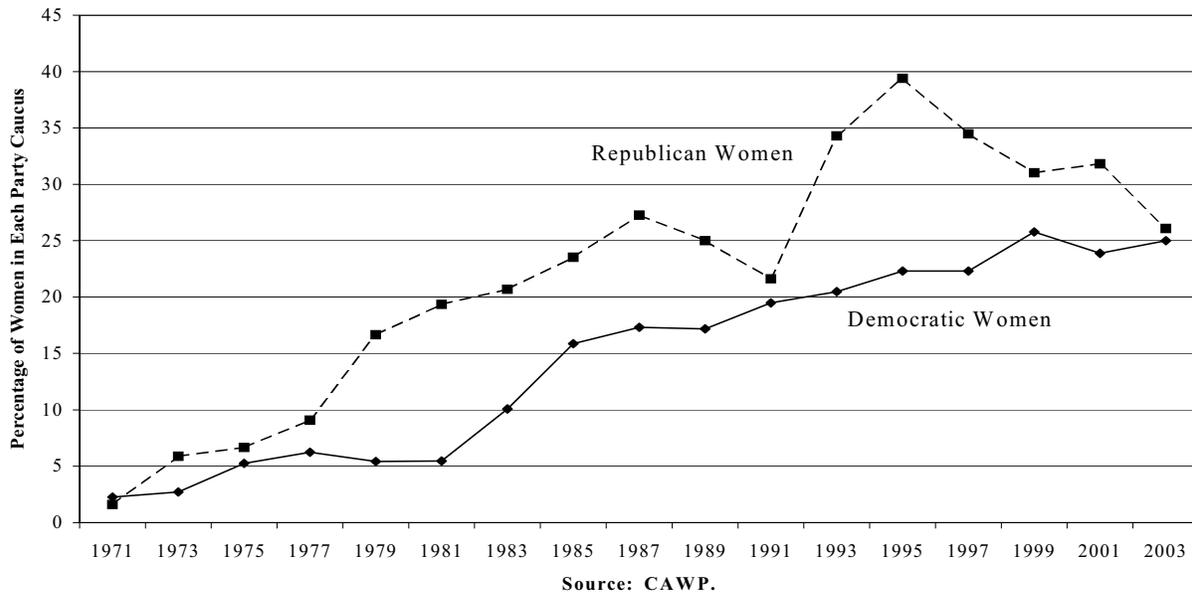


Figure 5
Women in the Massachusetts House



Past studies have demonstrated that the size of the pool of socially eligible women is related to the level of women’s representation in the legislature. Women’s progress in the field of law is typically correlated with the representation of women (Williams 1990), though this does not appear to be the case in Alabama. For example, women were 27% of lawyers in Massachusetts in 1995, 17% in Iowa, and 17% in Alabama (Carson 1999). In that year, 24% of legislators in Massachusetts were women, compared to 18% in Iowa, and 4% in Alabama.¹⁰ On another, more distant measure of the social eligibility pool, Alabama also trails Massachusetts and Iowa: 61.4% of women are in the labor force in Massachusetts and 65.7% of women in Iowa, compared to 56.9% of women in Alabama (U.S. Department of Labor 2002).

¹⁰ Data are from CAWP <<http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts4.html>>.

Note that there are differences in the relevant pool of potential candidates across states. Because the path to the legislature varies across states, the eligible pool of potential candidates in a given state may not be limited to local officeholders. For example, in a 1995 survey of current and former state legislators conducted by John Carey, Richard Niemi, and Lynda Powell, 65% of legislators in Massachusetts reported holding appointive or elective office prior to entering the legislature.¹¹ In contrast, only 38% reported such prior experience in Iowa, and 26% in Alabama.

In addition to the social eligibility pool, the number of open seats for the legislature are of particular interest because most incumbents are men. Legislative turnover varies across the three states, although none of these states has term limits. Prior to the 2002 election, only 12% of Massachusetts house seats were open in the general election because the incumbent retired or lost in the primary.¹² In contrast, 23% of house seats in Alabama were vacant, as were 35% of house seats in Iowa.

Table 3 presents statistics on women's presence as primary candidates for open seats in the 2002 state legislative elections, for both house and senate races. Comparing the two parties in these open seat contests, only 4 out of 38 Republican candidates in Alabama were women, compared to 7 out of 20 Democratic candidates. Although women were 20% of candidates who entered the primary for open seats in Alabama, only 1 of 11 women was ultimately successful; meanwhile, 16 of the 47 men who entered the primary for open seats were successful. Before the election, 8 women served in the Alabama house; 1 lost her primary in 2002, and 4 new women were elected, bringing the total number of women in the house to 11. Three of the newly

¹¹ These statistics were calculated using Carey, Niemi, and Powell (2000). Prior office includes appointive or elective local, county, statewide, or judicial office.

¹² These statistics are from the National Conference of State Legislatures. <<http://www.ncsl.org/statevote2002/turnover50.cfm?years1=2002>>.

elected women are Democrats who defeated incumbents from their own party. The presence of three women in the senate did not change.

Table 3. Women Candidates in the 2002 Primaries for Open Seats

	AL	IA	MA
% open seat candidates who were women	19%	27%	21%
% Democratic open seat candidates who were women	35%	28%	24%
% Republican open seat candidates who were women	11%	26%	13%

Compiled from data from CAWP and the Office of the Secretary of State in Alabama, Iowa, and Massachusetts.

In Iowa, the five women who entered the primary for open senate seats eventually lost. Two Republican women senators moved to the house because of redistricting. Women's presence in the Iowa senate declined overall. Before the election, 3 Democratic women and 8 Republican women served in the senate; in 2003, 1 Democratic woman and 6 Republican women serve. Nine of the 26 women who entered the primary for open house seats eventually won, as did 24 of the 59 men. Overall, the presence of women in the Iowa legislature will stay at about the same level as before the 2002 elections, with 25 women serving in the house in 2003, up from 22.

In Massachusetts, 21% of candidates entering primaries for open seats were women. There was only one open senate seat, and no woman entered the race. In the 16 open house seats, 6 of the 14 women who entered the primary eventually won, which is a higher success rate than men (9 of the 49 men eventually won). Overall, because some women retired from the

house and because there were so few open seats, there was little change in the presence of women in the Massachusetts legislature as a result of the 2002 elections—a net gain of 1 woman.

Thus women’s presence as state legislative candidates and state legislators varies across states. There are also some differences across the two parties within each state. Women continue to be underrepresented as candidates for open seats, which points to the importance of studying candidate recruitment.

Methodology

In order to analyze the process of candidate recruitment in each state, I conducted semi-structured interviews with members of both parties.¹³ Conducting interviews is a useful methodology for documenting the perspectives of party leaders and the details of the parties’ recruitment practices. I also use the interviews to investigate beliefs about women’s status as candidates in the state.

Most of the interviews were with current state legislators. I also interviewed the Democratic and Republican state party chairs and executive directors of each state.¹⁴ I interviewed some former legislators, members of women’s groups, statewide officeholders, and political activists. Overall, I sought interviews with people knowledgeable about candidate recruitment in the state. I also interviewed men and women currently serving in the legislature, or who had previously run for or served in the legislature, about their personal experiences as candidates. I sought a diverse sample of legislators in terms of ideology, district, tenure, party,

¹³ The dates of my field work are as follows: Boston, Massachusetts, November 5-9, 2001; Des Moines, Iowa, March 25-29, 2002; and Montgomery, Alabama, April 9-12, 2002. I conducted a total of 30 interviews in Massachusetts, 26 in Iowa, and 26 in Alabama. 3 of these interviews were conducted at the CAWP Forum in November, 2001. I conducted 3 telephone interviews with respondents in Massachusetts, 2 with respondents in Iowa, and 2 with respondents in Alabama.

¹⁴ I interviewed Kerry Murphy Healey a week before she was elected to chair the Republican party in Massachusetts.

and chamber.¹⁵ Almost all of the interviews were conducted in person and most were tape recorded. Most of the interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes.

The interviews with legislative and state party leaders and staff focused specifically on party involvement in state legislative races and candidate recruitment. The interviews with state legislators and candidates typically focused on the decision to first seek a seat in the legislature and whether he or she was recruited to run. I also asked legislators about any involvement they had in recruiting state legislative candidates. The interviews with women's groups addressed how and why the group formed, how the group was received, and how the group assists women candidates. I asked all interview subjects about their perceptions of any barriers or opportunities facing women in their state as candidates or potential candidates, and their perceptions of whether voters reacted to candidate gender.

I conducted 86 interviews across the three states (44 Democrats and 29 Republicans; 56 women and 30 men). The typical interview was with a current or former woman state legislator (39).¹⁶ More than one-third of the interviews (35) were with state party and legislative leaders and staff. In this report, I primarily analyze these interviews with party leaders and staff.

The Parties' Candidate Recruitment Practices

The extent to which the parties recruit candidates varies across the three states and the two parties, depending on the degree of two-party competition and which party controls the legislature. The parties are most active in recruiting candidates in Iowa, followed by Alabama,

¹⁵ I wrote to interview subjects to request an interview. Some individuals suggested to me by other interview subjects were solely contacted by telephone.

¹⁶ The distribution of these interview types across the three states are as follows: In Massachusetts, I interviewed 16 Democrats and 8 Republicans; 22 women and 8 men; 10 party leaders or staff; and 14 current or former women state legislators. In Iowa, I interviewed 13 Democrats and 14 Republicans; 21 women and 9 men; 18 party leaders or staff; and 15 current or former women state legislators. In Alabama, I interviewed 15 Democrats and 7 Republicans; 13 women and 13 men; 7 party leaders or staff; and 10 current or former women state legislators.

and then Massachusetts. Most party leaders do not think that candidate gender is a relevant criteria for identifying candidates, although views about women candidates differ across the states and across respondents. Candidate recruitment does not necessarily imply that the parties act as gatekeepers, and indeed, most party leaders in these states said that they remain neutral in the primary.

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, the Democratic party does not have to recruit candidates because it so thoroughly dominates the state legislature; most Democrats explained that there is no shortage of candidates. Majority Whip Lida Harkins, for example, said that there is much more candidate recruitment on the Republican side because it is not as necessary for the Democrats to seek out candidates. Democratic state party Chairman Philip Johnston, a former state representative, said he would like to see the party become more involved in recruitment and is making a particular effort to recruit more women and candidates of color. Interest groups, the Speaker of the House, or other individual legislators may also identify candidates. For the most part, however, most respondents argued that Democratic candidates come forward on their own.

The Massachusetts Republican party has the difficult task of fielding state legislative candidates. Jonathan Fletcher, the interim Republican party executive director, explained that the party typically looks to state committee members, local elected officials, the local party, chambers of commerce, and the business community to help identify potential candidates. The Republican house leadership also meets with candidates and works with the state party. Representative Bradley Jones, Jr., Assistant Minority Leader, explained that although the first

choice is to find candidates who are local elected officials, the ultimate goal is to find candidates willing to run.

Alabama

In Alabama, recruitment of state legislative candidates is primarily the responsibility of the state parties. The Republican party is more active in this regard. Marty Connors, the chairman of the Republican party, argued that although the Democrats are dominant in the legislature, the situation would be different were it not for partisan gerrymandering; he pointed out that Republicans hold over 70% of statewide elective offices. A problem for the Republican party, Connors explained, is that some of the groups allied with the party may not be interested in finding a Republican challenger if they already have a good relationship with the incumbent Democrat.

Connors looks to the local party as well as to groups affiliated with the party, including realtors, homebuilders, chamber of commerce groups, and the Christian Coalition, to identify candidates—although he argued that Democrats have more organized groups to help with candidate recruitment. In 2002, Connors focused on finding candidates in 16 to 18 seats that were held by Democrats but that leaned Republican in other races.

In general, Connors thought the best candidates are usually the ones who do not realize they are the best candidates and need to be drafted. He looks for someone with name identification, fundraising ability, and a volunteer network. Being a local elected official helps but is not necessary. As a general rule, the state party does not get involved in primaries, although local party officials may endorse candidates. Overall, Connors argued that primaries

are good for the candidates and enable the party to identify their voters, since voters do not register by party in Alabama.

Given the increasing competitiveness of the Republican party in the state, the Democratic party has become more involved in candidate recruitment. In addition, some Republican state representatives tried to defeat incumbent Democrats in 1998. This was unusual and prompted the Democratic caucus leadership to become active in recruitment. The house leadership limited its involvement to open seats, or about a dozen races.

The Alabama Democratic party worked with the caucus leadership in both chambers to recruit candidates. In both parties, it is apparently easier for the state party than sitting legislators to recruit candidates, given the high degree of cooperation between the two parties within the legislature. Indeed, in 2002, the Democratic and Republican house caucuses agreed not to field candidates against incumbents. This agreement did not preclude the state parties from doing so, however.

According to Marsha Folsom, the Alabama Democratic party executive director, the party relies on its large network of local parties, local elected officials, donors, and other leaders for names of candidates. There is no clear cut structure or procedure for the recruitment process, although the party communicates with its allied groups—the Alabama Education Association, Alabama Democratic Conference, and New South Coalition—about candidate recruitment. The party is not involved in the primary.

The outgoing member may also be an important source of suggestions for candidates; the incumbent usually knows who is interested in the seat. Indeed, House Majority Leader Ken Guin suggested that about half of candidates are identified through names provided by the outgoing member. While some Democrats argued that there is no shortage of candidates on the

Democratic side, Guin thought it is difficult to find candidates. Overall, however, most respondents said that candidates usually come forward on their own. For example, Demetrius Newton, Speaker Pro Tempore of the House, said that the party rarely recruits candidates.

Iowa

The practice of recruiting candidates is markedly different in Iowa compared to Alabama and Massachusetts, which no doubt reflects the greater degree of party competition and higher turnover in the legislature. In both parties, there are established candidate recruitment operations which include full-time staff. The primary responsibility for recruiting candidates lies with legislative leaders and staff hired through the campaign committees, with assistance from the state party and input from the county parties. The state parties house the campaign staff for the caucuses.

Since 1996, the Republican senate and house leadership have jointly worked together to recruit candidates. In that year, the house leadership, which had taken control of the house in 1992, helped their counterparts in the senate take the majority. The executive director of the Legislative Majority Fund, the joint campaign fund for the house and senate, helps the legislative leadership—including the legislator acting as legislative campaign chair—recruit candidates. Regular meetings about candidate recruitment are held with the fund staff, state party chair, state party executive director, and legislative leadership.

The Democratic party, as well, has campaign funds for state legislative elections, called the Truman Funds. Each caucus has a staffperson who helps the legislative leadership recruit candidates. In the house, the minority leader works with two of his assistant leaders to recruit

candidates; in the senate, the minority leader works with a caucus member who acts as the recruitment chair.

In 2001, the Iowa Democratic Party had conducted TEAM (“To Elect A Majority”) meetings across the state for the first time to bring the state party, legislative leaders, and local parties together to brainstorm about potential candidates. These were new meetings designed to build the local party structure and to increase state party involvement in candidate recruitment. However, responsibility for candidate recruitment largely lies with the minority leader in both chambers.

The process for identifying candidates works similarly for both parties, although there seemed to be more coordination among the house, senate, and state party on the Republican side than on the Democratic side in 2002. Typically, party leaders and their staff contact local elected officials and party activists to see if they are interested in running or know of a good potential candidate. The parties also look to their allied groups for suggestions. On the Republican side, groups commonly mentioned were the Association of Business and Industry, the Iowa Farm Bureau, taxpayer groups, chambers of commerce, and socially conservative groups; on the Democratic side, the relevant groups included labor, teachers, and attorneys. Party leaders sort through names, see what names surface repeatedly, and travel the state to interview potential candidates. Sometimes a candidate will surface on his or her own and contact the leadership about running. At this point, leaders make inquiries see if the person is perceived to be a good candidate. If the person does not seem to be the best candidate, the parties will continue to look for someone to enter the primary.

When I asked if the party starts by looking at local elected officials, a frequent response was “not necessarily.” For example, both Senate Minority Leader Michael Gronstal and the

chairman of the Republican Party of Iowa, Chuck Larson, Jr., said that sometimes local elected officials have an unpopular voting record, and so those individuals might not be the best candidates. While most or many legislative candidates in Iowa were thought to have been active in the party structure or held office previously, neither party viewed such experiences as a requirement—though both local elected officials and the local party organizations are natural places to look for candidates.

When I asked Marlys Popma, the executive director of the Republican party, whether there were areas of the state where local gatekeepers played an important role in the primary, she argued that those gatekeepers matter more at the recruitment stage than the primary stage: “Because if you have someone who is tremendously influential, and you’re discussing who should run for that office, and that very influential person says no, that’s not the right person, the likelihood that that recruitment process stops with that person is great.”

By most accounts, recruitment by the party explains why many candidates run for the legislature. Popma characterized candidate recruitment as “extremely important” when I asked whether recruitment was important or if most candidates emerged on their own. She estimated that one-quarter to one-half of candidates appear on their own, that another quarter are identified easily once phone calls are made, and between 10 to 25% of candidates require a lot of work to identify.

Similarly, according to Andy Warren, the executive director of the Legislative Majority Fund, only one or two candidates had contacted him rather than the reverse. Warren said he was looking for candidates in about 50 house seats and 20 senate seats, including senate seats where state representatives were running; Representative Bill Dix, the Assistant Majority Leader and the designated legislative campaign chairperson, said the house Republicans had been looking

for 31 candidates in targeted races, and had found 29 at the time of my interview in late March 2002. Candidate recruitment was also extensive on the Democratic side: the house Democrats were looking for candidates in 60 seats, 15 of which were targeted. On the senate side, Gronstal estimated that about 75% of candidates tend to be recruited by the leadership, excluding house members who decide to run for the senate.

Summary

In all three states, most party leaders argued that the party is usually neutral if there is a primary, although Majority Leader Guin in Alabama said there are few contested primaries in open seats, and some Iowa Democrats argued it is usually better if there is no primary. In Iowa, party leaders argued that even though they recruit candidates, they do not help them win the primary. Most Democratic and Republican leaders in Iowa said they stayed neutral in the primary unless an incumbent was challenged.

In sum, the two parties in Iowa have the most organized and extensive candidate recruitment operations of the three states. On the other end of the spectrum is the Massachusetts Democratic party, which does not need to recruit candidates. Currently, it is the job of the state Republican party in both Alabama and Massachusetts to find candidates. By their own accounts, recruitment is difficult because Democrats safely control the legislature.

Electoral Strategy and Candidate Gender

Beliefs about the electability of women candidates varied across interview respondents and across states. Voter attitudes about women candidates are generally not believed to be an issue in state legislative races in Massachusetts. However, some party leaders and staff in

Alabama and Iowa thought women candidates have a more difficult time getting elected than men—either in the state as a whole or in certain parts of the state. The extent to which party leaders take candidate gender into account when slating candidates also varies across states, with many leaders arguing that gender is not a relevant factor in identifying candidates. However, a few reported that they consciously seek out women candidates.

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, Republican party interim executive director Jonathan Fletcher said that the party does not recruit candidates on the basis of gender. When I asked if there were any conscious efforts to identify female candidates, House Minority Leader Francis Marini responded: “In my party, we’ll take any good candidate where we can find them. I mean, our problem is *lack* of candidates, not choices among people to encourage to run. You know, I would love to have more women running. I would love to have more men running also.” He explained: “In my party, I need people to participate. I can’t afford to pick and choose among the genders. If somebody wants to run, I want them to run.”

Marini thought women candidates might have a small advantage with voters because voters perceive them as more trustworthy. In addition, some voters want more gender balance in the political arena. Overall, however, Marini does not think that most voters take candidate gender into account. Neither party in Massachusetts seems to think that women candidates have an electoral advantage or disadvantage compared to men candidates.

Alabama

In Alabama, Republican state party chairman Connors said that he does not consider gender when recruiting candidates and does not think candidate gender affects voting behavior. Instead, he looks for the candidate who is most likely to win. Overall, he thought that women tend to do well when they run—although he also observed that fewer women candidates seem to come from the northwest corner of the state, and that women seem to fare better in urban areas.

Views were slightly different on the Democratic side. Alabama Democratic Party executive director Folsom thinks that a subset of voters are unwilling to vote for women candidates. This view was echoed by state party chairman Redding Pitt, who said that candidate gender matters in particular races, although how it matters depends on the context. Pitt thought that some voters are more predisposed to voting for women candidates, and that there is probably some bias both for and against women candidates. Some Republicans expressed similar views, with one respondent arguing that whether women and men are equally likely to win their races completely depends on the race.

Neither Folsom nor Pitt intentionally seek out women candidates. However, Representative Guin, the House Majority Leader, said he consciously sought to identify women candidates. His logic was that women voters who would otherwise support a Republican candidate might cross over and vote for a Democratic woman. In particular, he looked for women in their late 30s to 40s who might be able to appeal to Republican voters of the same age group. This strategy, as well as the role of the caucus in recruiting candidates, seemed to be new in 2002—although Guin reported that he was not able to recruit as many women as he would have liked.

Iowa

In Iowa, most Republican party leaders and staff said that candidate gender is not relevant to who is recruited or how candidates are slated—though some thought there is additional interest or excitement when a good woman candidate is identified because women are still a minority in the legislature. Most Republican party leaders believed that women and men are similarly situated as candidates and equally likely to win their races. For example, both Senate President Mary Kramer and Senate Majority Leader Stewart Iverson, Jr. said that they do not take gender into account in fielding candidates. However, Chairman Larson argued that there should be more women serving and said he had made it a personal priority to try to recruit more women. Larson explained that the party would go the “extra mile” to help a woman candidate get started, but that he does not exclusively look to recruit women candidates. According to Representative Libby Jacobs, the Majority Whip, the caucus consciously recruits women and is very cognizant that the caucus be diverse and representative of the state.

A number of party leaders and staff in Iowa thought that women tend to fare better in urban or suburban areas compared to rural areas. For example, Republican party executive director Popma thought it might be harder for a woman to win in rural Iowa than in suburban or urban areas. It might also be more difficult for a woman than a man to win office in those rural areas if she was not a farmer. Similarly, Chairman Larson said national polls indicate that a Republican woman has a 3 to 5 point advantage over a Democratic man in urban areas. However, he pointed out that women in the caucus also come from rural areas.

Republican party leaders and staff said gender might play a role in slating candidates on occasion. Speaker Brent Siegrist said that it is sometimes believed that women have an advantage in swing districts because women might vote for a woman over a man—though he

was not sure if this view is correct. Siegrist explained that he might take gender into account in slating candidates if a woman (or man) was thought to fare better in a particular district, but he emphasized that such attention to gender did not happen very often. He explained: “it’s difficult to get people to run at the legislative level as I’m sure you know in terms of the time away from family and the money, and so we take whoever comes up. And occasionally we’ll continue to recruit after somebody surfaces, but by and large gender doesn’t enter into it too much. As long as we think we have a good candidate.” However, Representative Dix, the Assistant Majority Leader, personally believes that women have an advantage with independents and new voters—an advantage he thought had developed in recent years. He might consider candidate gender if he is looking for a challenger to a Democratic incumbent or if he knows the opponent is going to be a woman candidate.

Democratic party leaders were more likely than Republican leaders to express concern about voter willingness to support women candidates. House Minority Leader Dick Myers argued that though he would like to think women have an equal chance of winning, he thought there is still some traditionalism among voters. In some parts of the state, he thought women and men are not always equally likely to win. Similar to the Republicans, some Democratic respondents pointed out that women legislators are more likely to come from urban or suburban areas than rural areas. For the most part, however, party leaders thought women and men fare similarly when they run.

Democratic party leaders were not monolithic in their views on gender and candidate recruitment. Senate Minority Leader Gronstal, for example, argued that he had consciously sought out women candidates because he thought it is harder for men to run a negative campaign against a woman. In addition, voters may see women as cooperative—a desirable trait in the

current political atmosphere. Finally, Gronstal explained that several women were retiring from the caucus that year, and that the caucus did not want to be all male.¹⁷

House Minority Leader Myers argued that more women and other members of underrepresented groups are needed in the house. However, one of his two assistants in charge of recruitment, Assistant Minority Leader Polly Bukta, said that recruiting women was not a top priority; she explained that her priority was to find the best candidate who could fit the district, though she was very happy to find women candidates. According to Bukta, it was a coincidence that such a large number of women candidates had been recruited for the house in 2002.

Summary

In sum, most leaders of both parties said candidate gender plays a small role—if any—in how they identify candidates. In some cases, however, party leaders believed that women have crossover appeal or benefit from gender stereotypes. While some party leaders in Alabama and Iowa believe that women’s electoral chances depend on the district, such concerns were largely absent in Massachusetts. It was not uncommon in Iowa and Alabama for party leaders and staff to think that voters reacted to candidate gender, making it easier for women to win office in some parts of the state than others, or making it generally more difficult for women to be elected than men.

Democratic party leaders and staff in Iowa were more likely than Republicans to perceive barriers to women’s candidacies, though not all thought there are barriers. Democrats were also more likely than Republicans to think that having more women elected to the legislature is an important goal.

¹⁷ Gronstal’s concerns were well-founded, since only 1 Democratic woman serves in the senate in 2003.

The Party Reputations

In cross-national studies of women's representation, some scholars have found that electoral competition can increase the likelihood that a party will adopt a gender quota for candidates in order to increase women's representation (Matland and Studlar 1996; Caul 2001). This idea of party contagion has received less attention in the United States. However, whether a party encourages women's candidacies may be influenced by electoral competition. I asked interview subjects whether the opportunities for women to become candidates differed by party.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Democratic party Chairman Johnston believes his party is more open to both women and minorities. In contrast, most Republican party leaders and staff in the state thought that the parties have similar reputations regarding women candidates. For example, Assistant Minority Leader Jones pointed out that women from both parties serve in the leadership and that both state parties have been chaired by women. Kerry Murphy Healey, who was elected to chair the Massachusetts Republican party shortly after my interview, thought that the Republican party was very welcoming to women. She pointed to Acting Governor Jane Swift and to her own role as the likely party chair, arguing that women had equal or better opportunities to become candidates in the Republican party.

Other respondents, including John Stefanini in Massachusetts, Chief Counsel to Speaker Finneran and himself a former state representative, commented that there are more opportunities for everyone in the Republican party simply because the state is overwhelmingly Democratic. Stefanini explained: "The pool within the Democratic side tends to be much more finite and exclusive, whether you're male or female. On the Republican side, it tends to be much more

infinite or open ended.” Republican party executive director Fletcher expressed a similar view, arguing that there are always opportunities to run on the Republican side. In addition, he believed that opportunities to move up the ladder are better for everyone in the Republican party, including women.

Alabama

At the time of my interviews, the Alabama Democratic party had taken a special interest in women voters. Plans were underway to charter the Alabama Federation of Democratic Women. Folsom, the executive director of the party, who is heading this effort, explained that the AFDW will be a statewide voice for women, will raise money, and recruit and train women for political office at all levels. By nurturing women and encouraging their political involvement, she hopes this will eventually lead women from the organization to run for office. In addition to the AFDW, Folsom explained that they are creating WIN PAC, a political action committee that will give to both men and women candidates who agree with the issues supported by the AFDW.

This current interest in women voters largely stems from Chairman Redding Pitt, who explained that one of his goals is to empower women within the operation of the party. In addition, Pitt is interested in attracting more women voters. Because women appear to be less partisan and less committed to the parties’ stances on racial issues, they represent an opportunity to break out of the traditional issue cleavage between the two parties.

Meanwhile, Connors, the Republican chairman in Alabama, expressed amusement at the Democratic party’s new initiative for women. He explained that the Alabama Federation of Republican Women was chartered in 1962 and has over twenty women’s clubs across the state.

He argued: “If we’re talking women, the assumption is well, Democrats are the party of women of course....Well, apparently not in Alabama. So, we’re proud of that.”

One respondent explained that there is a shorter line in the Republican party because of the party’s minority status, which arguably gives women more opportunities. However, in response to my question about whether women had more opportunities to become candidates in one party, Demetrius Newton, Speaker Pro Tempore of the Alabama House, responded: “They [the Republicans] do more soliciting candidates to run for certain spots. And if in their numbers, they don’t get a lot of women, I have to assume it’s because they don’t choose the women. But we don’t pick them over here. In the Democratic party, if they decide to run, they run under our banner. And if they win, they are our candidates.” Some Democratic leaders and staff thought that the Democratic party probably has more opportunities for women to become candidates than the Republican party.

Iowa

Republican party leaders and staff in Iowa thought that women have similar opportunities to become candidates across the two parties. Leaders from both parties were fairly knowledgeable about the two parties’ records. For example, both Senate Minority Leader Gronstal and Senate Majority Leader Iverson knew that the Republicans had fielded more women for the senate in 2002, though Iverson said he had not consciously sought to do so.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Speaker Siegrist said that the Republicans had apparently fielded slightly fewer women for the house than the Democrats, though he personally did not know the numbers. However, he noted that in 1996, Republicans had more women committee chairs than the

¹⁸ Iverson had issued a press release in March 2002, which stated that 11 of 35 Republican candidates filing for the Senate were women, compared to only 3 of 30 Democrats (Iverson 2002).

Democrats did in 1992, which may have been driven by seniority.¹⁹ Thus leaders from both parties in Iowa knew the numbers on women candidates—which may have partly resulted from the creation of a new women’s organization, which I discuss below, that put a spotlight on the number of women candidates running in 2002.

The Iowa Democratic Party chair, Dr. Sheila McGuire Riggs, believes her party offers more leadership opportunities for women. But overall, most leaders and staff I interviewed thought the two parties’ records are comparable. Even Riggs reflected on women who had recently won statewide office from each party, as well as the presence of a Republican woman as senate president, and argued that the numbers are pretty balanced.

Summary

It does not appear that there is a conventional wisdom in these states about which party has more opportunities for women to become candidates. In Iowa, party leaders knew the numbers on women candidates and women legislators. This did not necessarily mean that these records led the parties to recruit more women candidates. But it did mean that candidate recruitment was taking place in a context where the parties were cognizant of how they compared to the other party. In Alabama and Massachusetts, some respondents thought the Republican party has more opportunities for women because there are more openings in the minority party.

¹⁹ Siegrist issued a press release in 1999 that compared the two parties’ records on committee chairs under Democratic versus Republican control of the house. In the press release, he responded to a candidate recruiting event that had apparently taken place at the governor’s mansion. Siegrist argued: “I’m glad the Democrats have finally seen the light on this one. We’ve not only been recruiting highly qualified women to run for State Representative, but we’ve also put them in positions of leadership once they get elected” (1999).

Women's Organizations

I also asked party leaders and staff what interest groups, if any, help them recruit candidates. Women's groups were not typically included on the short list of allied groups that help the parties with recruitment. However, women's groups may suggest names to the parties and were also thought to recruit candidates to some extent. Pro-choice groups were probably mentioned most frequently, though most respondents thought these groups were primarily focused on funding candidates rather than recruiting them.

Iowa

In Iowa, a new organization was encouraging women to take advantage of the open seats created by redistricting. In the fall of 2001, Leeann Brunnette, a lobbyist, began the group "Iowa's Women in Public Policy" (WIPP). The original idea for WIPP was to create a network of women who affect public policy across the spectrum, including elected officials, staff, lobbyists, and business and community leaders. The overwhelming reception the group received at its first event, which was to raise funds for the fight against breast cancer, led to a more ambitious agenda. WIPP soon decided to take advantage of the open seats created by Iowa's nonpartisan redistricting process to improve the state's ranking in CAWP's data on women's representation and move up from 27th place. Incorporated as a 501(c)3, WIPP does not help women candidates financially. It seeks to educate and create an awareness about the need for women to get involved, to identify women to run for office, and to support women who run. In less than a year from its inception, WIPP's mailing list exceeded 2,000 names. At the time of my interviews, the organization was about to launch a membership drive.

Recruitment is an important component of WIPP's agenda. Brunnette explained that women need to be asked and encouraged to run for office: "You just need to continually build them up and let them know they would do a great job." The awareness created by WIPP and the campaign training they held in the fall of 2001 seemed to have paid off; Brunnette looked over her list of 69 candidates who had filed to run in the primary, including 31 women running in 26 open races, and attributed an effect for WIPP both indirectly and directly. She argued that WIPP had elevated the search for women candidates and had helped the parties recruit women. Indeed, both the Republican and Democratic state party chairs in Iowa serve on the board of directors of WIPP.

When asked what organizations, if any, consciously seek to recruit women candidates, in addition to WIPP, a number of interview respondents mentioned DAWN (Democratic Activists for Women Now), a pro-choice group, though DAWN was thought to be more involved in funding than recruiting candidates. No longer active is the Iowa Women's Political Caucus.

Massachusetts

In contrast to the situation in Iowa, the group that appears to be most active today was founded in 1971—the Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus (MWPC). MWPC has a large network and holds a campaign training for women candidates annually. MWPC announces open seats on its email list-serv, which includes 900 recipients. In addition, in October 2001 its PAC held an event called "Political Musical Chairs, Massachusetts Style," which focused primarily on expected open seats for the state legislature in 2002. There are other women's groups in the state as well, including Massachusetts NARAL, which apparently recruits both men and women candidates. "Women In," which is a project of a coalition of groups, began in 1996 and helps

progressive women win office.²⁰ It has not been very involved in recruiting candidates but is hoping to do so in the future.

Alabama

These women's networks in Massachusetts represent a contrast to the situation in Alabama, although there is a statewide, bipartisan PAC "Alabama Solution," which started in 1992 and funds women's candidacies. A new effort, called the "Alabama Women's Initiative" may signal the beginnings of a more organized political network of women in Alabama. The group held a press conference at the legislature in the spring of 2002. The Alabama Women's Initiative seeks to educate women and the state about women's status in Alabama and to encourage women to play leadership roles. Its 2002 report, "A Report on The Status of Women in Leadership in Alabama," rejected the notion that there are insufficient numbers of qualified women in the pool of candidates for elective office, arguing: "There are plenty of qualified women in Alabama at all levels. If the most qualified person had been chosen in each election, Alabama would not still be in last place in the number of women officeholders. What women have been denied is a fair opportunity in our present system" (Alabama Women's Initiative 2002: 40).

Summary

It was rare for party leaders to cite women's groups as one of the leading groups they look to for assistance with candidate recruitment. However, as many scholars have noted, women's groups and networks continue to be an important support system for women

²⁰ Women IN is a project of the progressive Commonwealth Coalition, composed of labor, environmental, citizen action, and women's groups, which endorses candidates for the state legislature.

candidates, providing training and funds and giving women needed encouragement to run for office (e.g., Rozell 2000; Duerst-Lahti 1998). These women's groups recruit women and bring names of potential candidates to the attention of the political parties. For example, Andy Warren of the Republican party's Legislative Majority Fund in Iowa recalled that WIPP gave him two names that he would not have known about otherwise.

Discussion

In the state with the most party involvement in candidate recruitment—Iowa—women do not appear to be disadvantaged by this party role. Most party leaders and staff said they do not usually take gender into account when recruiting candidates. This does not necessarily imply, however, that they think voters are indifferent to candidate gender. Many believe that women's electability depends to some extent on the area of the state. The view that women may be at an electoral disadvantage in some races coexists with the idea that candidate gender is unimportant in recruiting decisions—suggesting that the parties may not necessarily refrain from recruiting women in these areas. For example, Minority Leader Myers, who thought women might be less likely than men to win in some parts of the state, also believes that women need to be better represented in the legislature. He also pointed out that women could be a majority of his caucus after the 2002 elections.

The underrepresentation of women in the Alabama legislature was a non-issue in many respects. Some respondents said they do not know why more women do not run and that they wish more women were interested. For example, Representative Guin said he has always been surprised that more women are not running. However, neither state party in Alabama is consciously looking to recruit women to run for the state legislature—despite the state's ranking

at the time of my interviews as the lowest in the nation for women's representation. Indeed, one respondent in Alabama observed that it is rare for political people to consider the question of why more women are not in the legislature, arguing that those questions are more likely to be raised by academics or reporters.

In both parties, the presence of women legislators and legislative leaders had implications for the recruitment of women candidates. For example, Senate President Mary Kramer in Iowa frequently mentors women about becoming candidates. In addition, women in the caucus query the leadership about the number of women who have been recruited and suggest names of potential candidates.

Interest groups may also recruit candidates. Of the three states, this seems to be most common in Alabama on the Democratic side.²¹ Having preprimary endorsements and funds from interest groups are considered to be crucial to winning the primary in the state. The role interest groups play in shaping who enters the primary in Alabama, as well as who wins, may put women candidates at a disadvantage—particularly because several respondents thought interest groups were more likely to fund men candidates than women candidates.

The party structure itself does not appear to be a significant obstacle to women's candidacies in Iowa, since most party leaders do not think that the local parties are populated with gatekeepers. Indeed, some leaders view the party structure as a potential asset to women's candidacies. For example, the chair of the Iowa Democratic Party, Dr. McGuire Riggs, said she would like the party to level the playing field for women candidates. By providing a standard set of services to candidates, Riggs expects that women candidates will have more resources than they would otherwise. In addition, she invited the PAC EMILY's List to the state to run a

²¹ Thomas and Hrebenar (1999) classify interest groups as dominant in policymaking in Alabama. Interest groups also play a critical role in state legislative elections and candidate recruitment (Ehrenhalt 1991).

training specifically for women candidates in 2002. Similarly, Philip Johnston, the Massachusetts Democratic party chair, thought the party can benefit women candidates by helping them with fundraising, which seems to put women candidates at a disadvantage in his state.²²

The parties are not always perceived to be welcoming to women, however. It is important to note that I have primarily drawn from my interviews with party leaders and staff; I have focused on the parties' perspective and recruitment activities for the purposes of this report. However, women state legislators, women candidates, and women's groups usually identified more barriers facing women candidates than did party leaders and staff, including such barriers as voter attitudes, fundraising, and family responsibilities (Sanbonmatsu nd). Women frequently argued that they must work harder than men candidates and must prove that they are capable of doing the job. In addition, some women legislators argued that women are more likely to feel that they need to seek additional qualifications before running for the legislature, whereas young men will run directly out of college or law school.

In addition, the parties are perceived to be obstacles to women's candidacies to some extent.²³ In both Iowa and Alabama, for example, some respondents argued that the parties' interest in women candidates is quite recent—perhaps as recent as the last five years. Other respondents believe there are some gender differences in how candidates and potential candidates are treated. For example, one respondent in Iowa was discouraged from seeking her state legislative seat by her local party chair—even though she had been more active in the party than her male opponent. One Massachusetts legislator said that the Democratic party has

²² Many of the Massachusetts women I interviewed identified fundraising as a significant barrier.

²³ In my interviews in North Carolina and Ohio, women reported that party leaders, who are usually men, frequently overlook women potential candidates (Sanbonmatsu nd). In addition, women respondents in Alabama, North Carolina, and Ohio frequently used the term “old boys network” when discussing barriers to women's candidacies.

become more receptive to women candidates, but that for many years, women faced bias within the party—and continue to face barriers—because it has historically been dominated by Irish-Catholic men. In addition, another respondent argued that women who come from outside the Democratic party structure do not seem to get the same reception as men who are new to the party; party leaders do not seem to hold a woman candidate without party connections in as high a regard as they would an equivalent man.

The parties can have a significant impact on who runs for the legislature because they encourage candidates to run who might not otherwise have considered it. Even if the party is not actively recruiting candidates, the beliefs of party leaders about women's electability may still affect who runs for office. In most states, the parties do not endorse candidates before the primary. However, the nature of informal reactions to a woman's potential candidacy can be important to whether she runs for office.

Across states, women will be more likely to run if they think they can win. Scholars have argued that the decision to run for office depends in part on the candidate's belief that he or she can win (Maisel 1982; Maisel and Stone 1997; Stone and Maisel 1999). Thus, women are likely to calculate their probability of winning when making the decision about whether or not to run for the legislature. For example, Stefanini, Chief Counsel in the Speaker's office in Massachusetts, argued that women are more likely to run in suburban districts than urban districts. The suburban areas are typically characterized by higher voter turnout and more independent voters compared to urban areas. There is more of a political ladder in the urban areas, with individuals planning a run for office for several years prior to seeking a seat in the legislature. Stefanini observed that women state legislators are more likely to come from suburban districts because of the salience of education issues—creating a natural fit for women

candidates there. In short, he argued that political campaigns tend to be “self-selecting”: “To the extent that a candidate sees themselves as viable or not, increases the likelihood that they will in fact be a candidate.”

Women—like men—may not run if they think they will not win. This problem may be particularly acute in Alabama. Former state senator Ann Bedsole, the first woman to serve in the state senate and the first Republican woman to serve in the house, said it is very difficult for women to win in state legislative races. When I raised the argument that the problem is that more women need to run for the legislature, her response was that women probably know better than to try. This sentiment—that women may not enter if they think they will lose—may help explain why the presence of women in open seat races varies across states.

Conclusion

This study has provided preliminary evidence about how candidate recruitment practices affect women’s representation. Past scholars have examined the success rates of women who have run in the general election for the state legislature, finding that women tend to win their races at the same rates as men in the aggregate (e.g., Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997).²⁴ However, studies of women’s success rates overlook the critical question of *where* women run.²⁵

The likelihood that women will run for the legislature varies considerably across states. Incumbency continues to be an obstacle. But even in states without term limits, incumbency may be less of an obstacle depending on the average rate of turnover in legislative seats. The degree to which women are present in the social eligibility pool also shapes women’s

²⁴ There have been fewer studies of women’s success rates at the primary level, and of women’s success rates in individual states.

²⁵ See Fox (2000), who points out that the variation across states in women’s presence in the congressional delegation also suggests that where women run is not the same across the country.

representation. But the pool is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition. The path to the legislature varies across states, with the relevant pool specific to each state to some extent. In addition, because women legislators tend to come from a more diverse set of occupational backgrounds than men, measures of the social eligibility pool may not capture the routes women typically take to elective office.

The following conclusions from this study are preliminary and merit further investigation.

- *Candidate Recruitment.* The process of candidate emergence and recruitment varies across states. In some states, party recruitment explains why a significant proportion of candidates decide to run for office. The amount and nature of gatekeeping by party leaders varies across states as well.

Where the parties recruit candidates to run or formally or informally support candidates in the primary, party leaders can play a major role in shaping the social composition of the legislature. In Iowa, for example, both parties have extensive recruitment efforts and fulltime, paid staff. In states with an organized recruitment process, whether that process yields women candidates very much depends on party leaders' perceptions of the quality and electability of women candidates and their personal knowledge of or access to names of potential women candidates (Sanbonmatsu nd). These recruitment efforts also turn on the beliefs of local political leaders, since the parties often rely on those leaders for names and for assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of potential candidates. Thus, the candidate recruitment process means that party leader evaluations of potential candidates can shape who ultimately runs for the legislature.

- *Viability.* Beliefs about women’s electability vary across states. In some states, voter attitudes are not thought to be an obstacle to women’s candidacies. This is not the case in other states, however. Many respondents in both Alabama and Iowa—including party leaders and staff—believe that some voters are less likely to support women candidates than men candidates. Some respondents believe that women candidates have a net electoral disadvantage. It is simply not the case that party leaders across the country hold the same views about women’s electability. These beliefs may affect who is recruited and who runs.

- *Descriptive Representation.* Party leader beliefs about the importance of electing more women to office also varies across states. Many party leaders are happy to recruit women candidates but are not interested in consciously trying to increase women’s presence in office for normative or other reasons. Other party leaders want a legislature that reflects the population and claim they make an effort to recruit women candidates. Where these beliefs are present, more party involvement in both candidate recruitment and gatekeeping can be expected to benefit women.

- *Party Contagion.* The Democratic and Republican parties are sometimes conscious of the two parties’ records on women candidates—which may affect their incentives to recruit women. In Iowa, most party leaders argued they do not recruit candidates on the basis of gender. Yet both parties were aware of how their party stood relative to the opposing party. This dynamic, though not present in all states, is a potential avenue for increasing women’s candidacies, although it is not clear that it played a large role in Iowa.

- *Party Competition.* Women may have more opportunities for office in the minority party than in the majority party. In the three states examined here, the parties were often thought to have similar records. However, some respondents argued that there are more opportunities for

women candidates in the minority party because there are more openings in general. This seems to be the case in Massachusetts and Iowa, but not Alabama (see Figures 3-5). There may be less intraparty competition for the nomination in the minority party than in the majority party. The minority party may also be disproportionately interested in women candidates because women are sometimes perceived to appeal to swing voters.

- *Women Legislators, Leaders, and Organizations.* The presence of women legislators, women leaders, and women's organizations continue to facilitate the election of women. First, women may be more likely than men to recruit women to run: they are more likely than men to know women and they are more likely to want more women in office. Second, not only do women in office provide role models and demonstrate that women can campaign and govern, but incumbent women legislators, and women in leadership, may put women candidates at ease about running. Women legislators and women in leadership positions are sometimes called upon to meet with or mentor potential candidates. Third, women within the legislature, by raising the issue of the recruitment of women candidates, may shape who is recruited. Fourth, women's networks and organizations can themselves recruit women or channel names to party leaders. However, it is important to note that women's groups were not usually considered to be one of the most important party-affiliated groups that party leaders look to for assistance with candidate recruitment.

- *Interest Groups.* In states where interest groups play a large role in primary elections, having the support of those groups may be critical to not only winning the primary, but to entering the primary in the first place. Where interest groups are actively involved, it may be harder for women than men to attract the support of those groups prior to the primary. This dynamic, which seems to exist in Alabama, is no doubt compounded by the more conservative

views of the electorate there as well as the smaller pool of women eligible for office compared to other states.

- *Candidate Emergence.* Even where the party is not actively recruiting candidates, informal preprimary dynamics can make or break women's candidacies. The informal conversations that potential candidates have with local or state party leaders, as well as activists and donors, can be critical to the decision to run for office. Women, as well as men, will be less likely to run if they expect to lose. Receiving encouragement to run may be less likely in contexts where women have not historically held many seats in the legislature, where public opinion is conservative, and where party leaders do not think women are viable candidates. As past research about candidate emergence has argued, the probability of winning shapes a candidate's decision to enter a race. In states like Alabama, that probability is probably lower from the vantage point of potential women candidates than potential men candidates.

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