

Are We Progressing Toward Equal Representation for Women in the Minnesota Legislature? New Evidence Offers Mixed Results

by Sally J. Kenney, Kathryn Pearson, Debra Fitzpatrick, and Elizabeth Sharrow



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State representative Alice Hausman (DFL-St. Paul) addressing the Minnesota House of Representatives.

The candidacies of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin in the 2008 election are evidence that women are making progress politically. Minnesotans can be proud that women constitute almost 35% of the state legislature, the fourth highest level in the country. Alongside this good news, however, are more sobering numbers. Women continue to be underrepresented in elected office at the national, state, and local levels, whether one compares their numbers with the population as a whole or to the qualified labor pool. In 2009, a record number of women were serving in the U.S. Congress, yet women constituted only 17% of its membership. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the

United States ranks 71st in the world for the percentage of women serving in the lower legislative chamber, ranking behind Iraq, Pakistan, and China. In the United States, women are more likely to serve in the state legislature; yet according to the Center for American Women and Politics, only 24% of state legislators in the United States are women. Although 14.8% of Minnesota's mayors and 27.3% of its city-council members are women, half of Minnesota's county commissions include no women.¹ The evidence shows

¹ Legislative Commission on the Economic Status of Women, "Women in Elected Offices of Local Governments in Minnesota, 2009," www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/oesw/wmnpuboff/localgov09ve.pdf.

that progress has been made, but also that there is still a long way to go. More worrying, however, is that that progress seems to have stalled. Although increases in the number of women in Congress can be celebrated, the percentage increased by only 1% in 2008. Similarly, in Minnesota, the number of women in the legislature (70) plateaued from 2006 to 2008 (Figure 1). During the past decade, women have gained only 8 seats out of 201 in the Minnesota legislature.

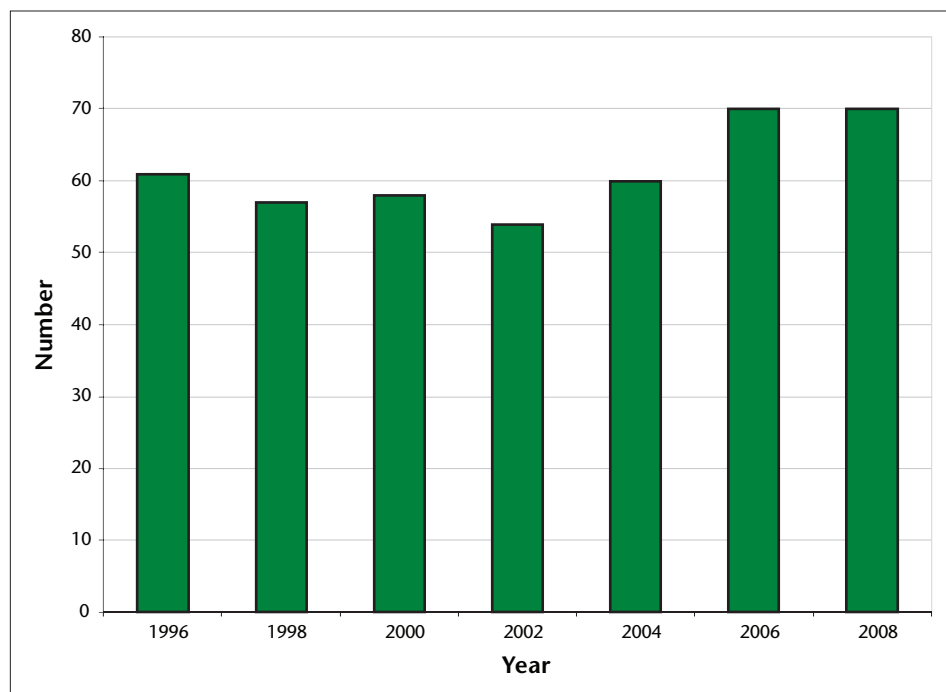
Gender shapes campaigns for all offices, but in different ways, depending on the level of office, the regional demographics, and the electoral rules. For example, research by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation has shown that

women have more success seeking legislative than executive office. In Minnesota, women enjoy more success seeking some local offices (school board and city council) than others (county commissioner and mayor). Systematic analysis of all congressional districts reveals that certain types of districts are more “women friendly” than others.² Women’s representation in state legislatures varies enormously, from a majority in the New Hampshire Senate to zero in the South Carolina Senate. Moreover, our observations suggest that the pipeline itself may be gendered. The path to mayor for a man may be through the city council, yet women may not enjoy success through the same pathway. Finally, gender differences in party gatekeeping and recruitment may vary by constituency and office; parties may recruit women for urban but not rural seats, and for legislative but not executive offices.

Voter discrimination against women no longer explains women’s underrepresentation in elected office, although candidates and analysts allege gender bias in particular races (most recently, Hillary Clinton’s run in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary).³ Extensive research across multiple elections demonstrates that when women are candidates in congressional primaries,⁴ and run in general elections as challengers, incumbents, and open-seat contestants,⁵ they win at the same rate as men, when accounting for incumbency. No systematic analysis has determined whether these gender-neutral results hold in Minnesota’s state legislative races.

We analyzed an original, comprehensive set of candidate-level data

Figure 1. Women Elected to the Minnesota Legislature in General Elections, 1996–2008



Note: Data represent House and Senate legislators combined.

Source: Legislative Coordinating Commission, Office on the Economic Status of Women, “Status Report: Women in the Minnesota Legislature, 2009,” www.commissions.leg.state.mn.us/oesw/wmnpuboff/2008.pdf.

for Minnesota legislative campaigns since 1997. This data set allows, for the first time, the opportunity to analyze whether gender affects electoral success in the state of Minnesota. The research upon which this article is based was supported in part through a grant from CURA’s New Initiative program. Additional funding was provided by the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, the University of Minnesota’s Grant-in-Aid of Research, Artistry and Scholarship Program, the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; and the Department of Political Science at the University of Minnesota.

Methodology

We created the Minnesota Legislative Candidate Database to analyze Minnesota state legislative campaigns from 1997 through 2008. The candidate-level data set contained 2,780 cases, including all general election candidates, all primary candidates, and candidates who filed but dropped out before their primary election in each legislative-election cycle over the 11-year period, along with candidates in a handful of special elections. Of the 2,780 candidates running in state legislative elections from 1997 to 2008, 735 were women (26.4%). Our unit of analysis was candidate-year, so the data set

included many of the same candidates in multiple election years. Although Minnesota elections often include third-party candidates, 2,516 candidates (90.5%) in our data set were major-party candidates, i.e., Democrats (DFL) or Republicans (GOP). We conducted our analysis only on candidates from these two major parties.

We compiled the initial list from all candidates who registered their campaign committee with the Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board. We augmented this list with information from the Minnesota Secretary of State Election Results and Statistics website to ensure that we included all candidates receiving votes in primary and general elections in the full data set. We collected vote share, party identification, and incumbency status from the Minnesota Secretary of State and the Minnesota Legislature online resources. We ascertained candidate gender through name identification and online searches of local media surrounding the campaign. We identified candidates who ran in the preprimary stage as those registered with the Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board, because neither state officials nor local political parties collect or maintain endorsement information. We obtained campaign-finance

² B. Palmer and D. Simon, *Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling: Women and Congressional Elections* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³ See *Politics & Gender’s* Critical Perspectives on Gender and Politics section on the 2008 presidential race, *Politics & Gender* 5 (2009): 69–110, particularly the article by L. Huddy and T.E. Carey, “Group Politics Redux: Race and Gender in the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primaries,” *Politics & Gender* 5 (2009): 81–96.

⁴ J.L. Lawless and K. Pearson, “The Primary Reason for Women’s Under-Representation? Re-Evaluating the Conventional Wisdom,” *The Journal of Politics* 70 (2008): 67–82.

⁵ Examples include R.L. Fox, “Congressional Elections: Where Are We on the Road to Gender Parity?” in S.J. Carroll and R.L. Fox (editors), *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and R.K. Gaddie and C.S. Bullock, III, *Elections to Open Seats in the U.S. House* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

data from the National Institute on Money in State Politics.

We also collected district-level information for each candidate in the data set. Minnesota has 67 Senate districts, each of which is subdivided into 2 subsidiary House districts. Elections for the Minnesota House occur biannually (in 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008 in our data set), whereas Senate elections occur every four years, except two years after redistricting (in 2000, 2002, and 2006 in our data set). We compiled demographic information describing each district from U.S. Census data (including district racial diversity, constituent education level, and median income). Minnesota legislative districts represent a great diversity of urban, suburban, exurban, and rural geographies. Using information from the *Politics in Minnesota* guide, we categorized each district as rural, urban, suburban, or mixed to analyze regional differences in the gender dynamics surrounding legislative elections. We included a measure of district partisanship based on presidential vote share in each House district in the 2000, 2004, and 2008 elections.

These data allowed us to explore longitudinal and cross-sectional trends in Minnesota legislative elections. We augmented this longitudinal data with an in-depth survey (the 2006 Minnesota State Legislative Candidate Survey) of the 2006 legislative candidate cohort. In the summer and fall of 2008, we surveyed all 527 major-party candidates who ran for the Minnesota House or Senate in the 2006 election cycle. Our survey gathered additional information regarding the candidates' political experiences prior to running, their experiences with the endorsement process, and their opinions regarding gender dynamics in their campaign. We conducted the survey initially by mail, including two follow-up mailings through the early fall of 2008. We then contacted nonrespondents via e-mail with an online response option, and then via telephone. These multiple contact attempts yielded 247 responses and 37 refusals. The response rate was 47% when not including refusals, and was 54% when including survey decliners. Survey respondents were reasonably representative of the 2006 cohort population. Respondents roughly mirrored the 2006 candidate population at large in terms of gender (49% of women candidates responded, 45% of men), party (59% of Democrats

responded, 38% of Republicans), and legislative chamber (49% of House candidates responded, 42% of Senate candidates). Republicans were slightly underrepresented, particularly Republican women.

Results

The Number of Women Candidates Running for the Minnesota House Has Stagnated. From 1997 to 2008, the overall number of women running for the state legislature in Minnesota increased, although the rise has been uneven and recently the

number has slightly fallen (Figure 2). Women's candidacies in House general elections peaked in 2004 and declined in the two subsequent elections. In 2000, 71 women ran for the House, compared with 85 in 2004 and 76 in 2008. In general elections for the Senate, however, women's candidacies have increased in the past decade. In 2000, only 33 women ran, but in both 2002 and 2006, 41 women ran for the Senate. Our data included 268 Republican women candidates (9.6% of all candidates in our data set) and 432 DFL women candidates (15.5% of all



Minnesota state senators Lisa Fobbe (DFL-Zimmerman), left, and Michelle Fischbach (R-Paynesville).

Photo by David J. Oakes, courtesy of Minnesota Senate Media Services. All rights reserved.

candidates in our data set). DFL women significantly outnumbered Republican women in every election cycle, but the decline in women's candidacies from 2004 to 2008 occurred in both parties. These large partisan differences in women's candidacies foreshadow partisan differences in women's experiences as candidates that we found from our candidate survey and detail below.

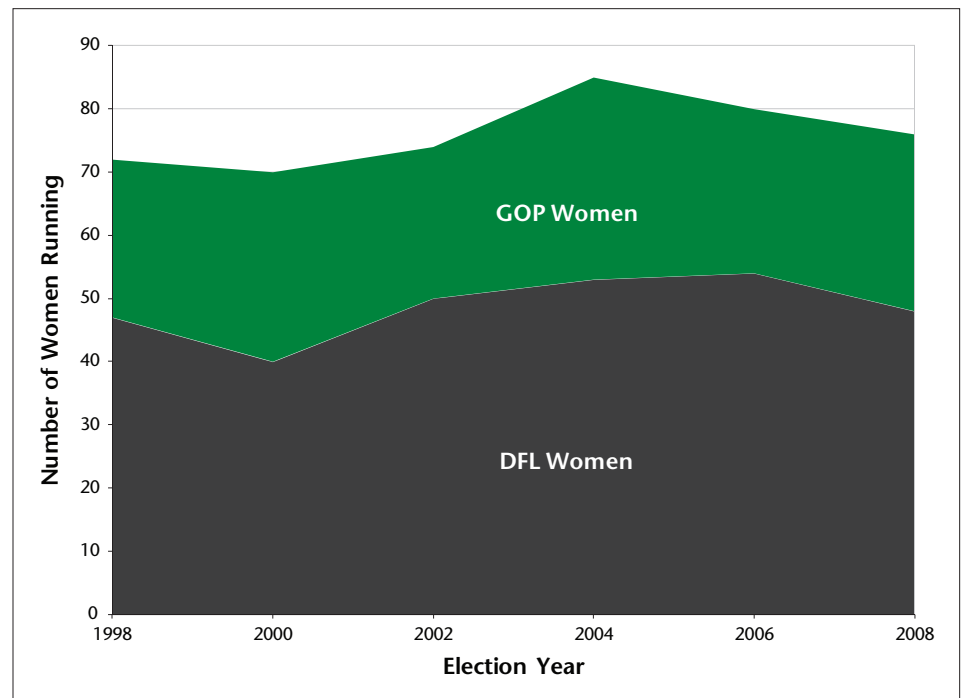
When Women Run, Women Win.

Women have a long way to go from 34.8% of the 2008 Minnesota legislature to reach equal representation. Women's current underrepresentation, however, is not the result of gender differences in party endorsements, primary competition, general election votes, or fundraising. In each of these stages of the electoral process in Minnesota, we found either gender-neutral outcomes or that women had small advantages.

Party Endorsement. Several features of Minnesota's electoral system may hinder women's candidacies more than men's. In studies of women's underrepresentation, political parties have emerged as a key culprit. In perhaps the largest study of the effects of parties on women's candidacies to date, one researcher found that strong party organizations have a negative effect on women's representation; fewer women ran for and held state legislative office where parties were more engaged in gatekeeping activities.⁶

Minnesota's unusually strong party system, marked by its caucus system and preprimary endorsement process, provided us with the opportunity to test the effects of party recruitment, endorsement, and gatekeeping on women's candidacies. In Minnesota, party caucuses choose delegates who endorse candidates at conventions months before Minnesota's September primary elections. Candidates who do not receive the endorsement face considerable pressure to drop out of the race. Party conventions and subcaucuses that endorse candidates typically ask them whether they will abide by the endorsement process. Anecdotal evidence from Minnesota, such as the difficulty Joan Grove had in securing the DFL endorsement for U.S. Senate in 1984, and, more recently, Judi Dutcher's failure to win the DFL endorsement for governor in 2002, has suggested that the endorsement process may hinder

Figure 2. Women's Candidacies, Minnesota House General Elections, 1998–2008



women's candidacies. However, prior to our study, no one had systematically tested for the effects of parties on women's bids for the Minnesota legislature. Using our Minnesota Legislative Candidate Database and our 2006 Minnesota State Legislative Candidate Survey, we explored whether women were less likely to receive their party's endorsement than men.

To test whether the party endorsement process forced women out, we analyzed preprimary dropout rates for male and female legislative candidates. Overall, 13% of DFL and Republican candidates dropped out before the party primary, indicating that these were the candidates who did not receive their party's endorsement. Men (13.7%) were slightly more likely to drop out of their race before the primary than women (12.7%). However, we found that this difference in dropout rates between genders was not statistically significant; only incumbency status and running in a rural district were statistically significant in decreasing the likelihood of a candidate dropping out before the primary election. This evidence, then, does not suggest that the parties are hindering women candidates in the endorsement process.

Because not all candidates who do not receive the party endorsement drop out, the analysis presented above may not include the entire universe of candidates denied the party endorsement. Therefore, we also analyzed a

more direct measure of party endorsement from our 2006 Minnesota State Legislative Candidate Survey. Our survey specifically asked about the party endorsement process, and the results confirmed our analysis of our data set regarding preprimary dropout rates and party endorsements. We asked candidates to describe their decision to seek their party's endorsement, whether or not they obtained endorsement, and what type and amount of competition emerged in their contest. We found that the most significant predictors of endorsement were party and incumbency status, not gender. When we controlled for factors such as incumbency and competition, our findings of gender neutrality for the endorsement process held. Therefore, through analyses of both our data set and survey data, we found that women were as likely as men to receive their party's preprimary endorsement.

Party Primary Elections. We next analyzed gender dynamics in primary competition. The overwhelming majority of candidates in our data set ran unopposed in their primaries (Table 1). Although a majority of candidates ran unopposed in primary legislative races nationally, Minnesota's preprimary party endorsement process may be more likely to depress primary competition in many races. Only 13.5% of candidates in our data set faced any opposition in the primary (10.5% of women and 14.7% of men).

⁶ K. Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run: Gender and Party in the American States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

Table 1. Comparing Minnesota State Legislative Election Competition, by Gender, Party, and Chamber, 1997–2008

	Total Candidates	Unopposed in Primary	Dropped Out Preprimary	Primary Victory Rates	General Election Victory Rates	Fundraising Means
GOP Women						
House	208 (10.7%)	159 (88.3%)	28 (13.5%)	171 (95.0%)	73 (42.4%)	\$24,198 (\$13,077)
Senate	60 (10.7%)	46 (85.2%)	6 (10.0%)	52 (96.3%)	33 (63.5%)	\$42,654 (\$22,838)
GOP Men						
House	763 (39.3%)	602 (88.8%)	85 (11.1%)	633 (93.4%)	313 (49.4%)	\$24,199 (\$16,409)
Senate	210 (37.4%)	140 (80.9%)	37 (17.6%)	135 (86.0%)	51 (32.7%)	\$35,598 (\$24,890)
DFL Women						
House	344 (17.7%)	276 (91.4%)	42 (12.2%)	290 (96.0%)	154 (53.1%)	\$26,432 (\$13,710)
Senate	88 (15.7%)	66 (88.0%)	13 (14.8%)	73 (97.3%)	46 (63.0%)	\$42,626 (\$22,303)
DFL Men						
House	628 (32.3%)	462 (84.8%)	83 (13.2%)	494 (90.5%)	267 (53.9%)	\$22,870 (\$13,887)
Senate	199 (35.5%)	121 (77.1%)	42 (21.1%)	154 (89.0%)	82 (60.3%)	\$37,765 (\$23,526)

Note: Except for the fundraising column, cells contain numbers and percentages. The fundraising column reports means per candidate, with standard deviations in parentheses. The data represent 1,943 House candidates and 561 Senate candidates running from 1997 to 2008.

Party and chamber matter; DFL women in both the House and the Senate were less likely to face primary competition than were men (a difference of 6.6% and 10.9%, respectively), whereas Republican women in the House were 0.5% more likely to face competition than men and Republican women in the Senate are 4.3% less likely to face competition than men. When we controlled for factors that would likely affect primary competition, including the candidate's incumbency status, whether the candidate is running in an open seat, which chamber a candidate is running for, and district characteristics (urban versus rural), we found that women were significantly less likely to run in competitive primaries than men. In addition, Republican men and women were also significantly less likely to face competition than Democratic men. The evidence does not support the notion that women were more likely to face primary challenges than men; in fact, the opposite was true.

When we analyzed our data set to determine outcomes for candidates competing in primaries (including those running unopposed), we found that women won primaries to compete for state legislative office in the general election at slightly higher rates (95.9%) than men (91.1%). DFL women won at the highest rate (96.3%) when compared with DFL men (89.5%), Republican women (95.3%), and Republican men (92.5%).⁷

When we analyzed the data after applying the controls described above, as well as a variable indicating a candidate ran unopposed, DFL women were not advantaged. Republican women, however, were significantly more likely to win primaries than DFL men, and no statistically significant difference existed between the primary victory rates of Republican men and DFL men. We found the same outcome when looking at primary victories among

only candidates who faced competition. Party primaries clearly did not hinder women's chances to make it to the general election, and they actually seemed to help Republican women.

General Election Results. Research has shown that women and men win general elections at the same rate nationwide. We wanted to examine if the same held true for legislative elections in Minnesota. Our analysis of our data set revealed that women were slightly more likely (52.1%) than men (50.2%) to win in a general election contest, and women received, on average, a slightly higher percentage (51.1%) of the vote share than men (49.2%). Republican women's edge appeared to drive these differences; on average, Republican women won 47.3% of the time (1.2% higher than Republican men) and DFL women won 55.1% of the time (0.2% less than DFL men). However, when we controlled for incumbency, running in a House election, election year, and fundraising, we found no statistically significant

⁷ In all three instances, results were statistically significant.

differences in victory rates between DFL women and DFL men.

When we disaggregated Minnesota House and Senate results, striking differences emerged among Republicans. Republican women won Senate elections at a rate of 63.5%, whereas Republican men won Senate elections at a rate of 32.7%. However, Republican women only won House seats at a rate of 42.4%, whereas Republican men won House seats 49.4% of the time. We found that both DFL men and women were more likely to win Senate races than House races. These disparate victory rates merit further investigation, especially because increases in women senators over the last few years have ameliorated the overall stagnation in women's representation in the state legislature as a whole.

Fundraising. Raising money is an important component of any legislative race, even in Minnesota where campaign-finance laws tightly restrict how much money citizens can give and how much candidates can spend. We measured candidates' campaign expenditures in two ways. First, we included a measure of the total number of dollars that a candidate raised. Second, we calculated the proportion of money each candidate raised in a legislative district in that election cycle (including the primary, because the campaign-finance data were collected throughout the course of the entire election cycle).

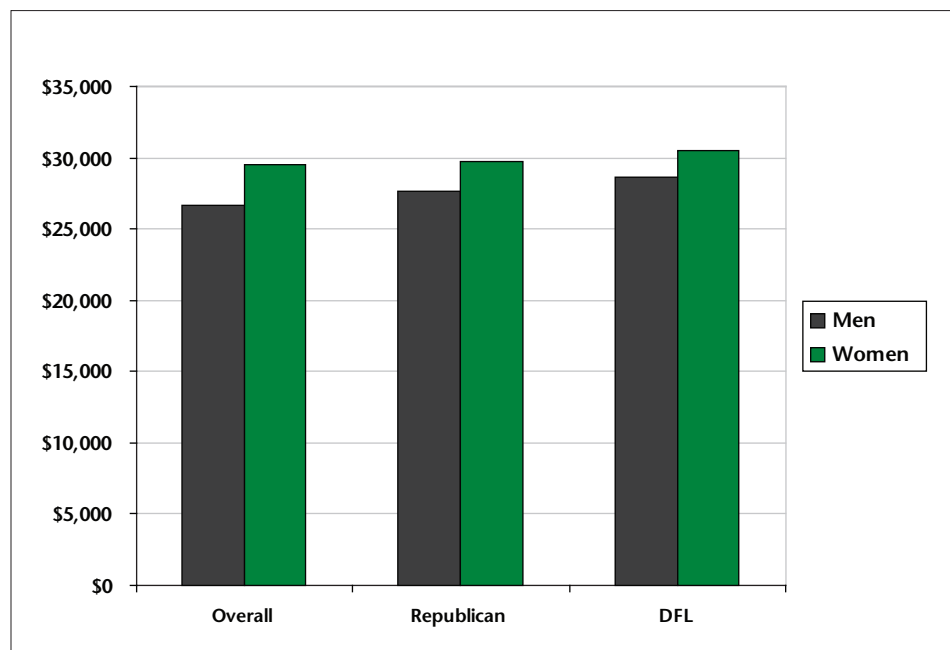
In terms of campaign fundraising, our results showed that women outraised men (Figure 3). On average, women raised \$29,550 and men raised \$26,686. When we disaggregated the results by party affiliation, we found that DFL women raised the most money (an average of \$30,486) in the districts where they competed, followed by Republican women, DFL men, and Republican men (who raised the least, \$27,648). When we controlled our analysis for incumbency, the chamber, and the year, DFL women's financial advantage was still statistically significant: DFL women, but not Republican women or Republican men, raised a significantly higher proportion of money than DFL men. Although our data did not tell us where the candidates' money comes from, women's groups in Minnesota are quite active in funding female candidates, particularly pro-choice, DFL candidates. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women's group fundraising contributes to DFL women's advantage, both in political action committee contributions and, in some cases more importantly, in

bundling contributions—that is, gathering contributions from many individuals and presenting the sum to targeted candidates. Women were not underrepresented in the Minnesota Legislature because they fail to raise money, or cannot raise as much money as men.

Where Women Run: Regional and Partisan Variation. The slow and uneven growth of women's candidacies in Minnesota notwithstanding,

the results we have presented so far reveal that, as at the federal level, when women in Minnesota ran for the legislature, they were just as likely to win as men. Indeed, women's overall experiences in the past decade suggest that a woman considering a candidacy in Minnesota has no reason to think that her electoral outcomes will be worse than those of a similarly situated man. In some cases, women have good reason

Figure 3. Minnesota State Legislative Campaign Fundraising per Election Cycle, 1997–2008



Note: Values represent mean per candidate.



Minnesota state senators Kathy Saltzman (DFL-Woodbury), left, and Patricia Torres Ray (DFL-Minneapolis).

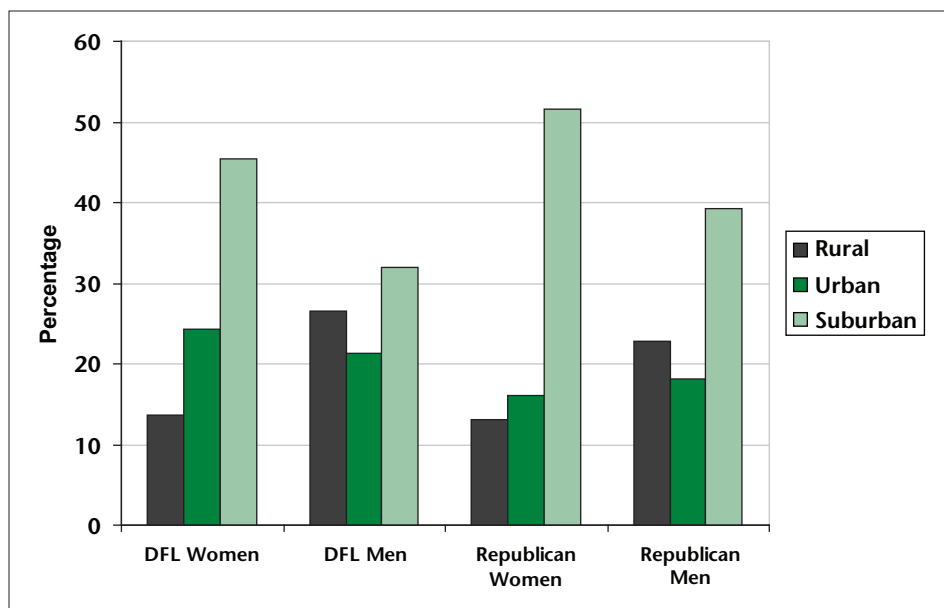
Photo by David J. Oakes, courtesy of Minnesota Senate Media Services. All rights reserved.

to think they will outperform men. Our aggregated results, however, may mask important regional and partisan differences.

Previous research has uncovered systematic differences in the types of districts represented by congresswomen and congressmen. Scholars have identified districts that were liberal, urban, racially diverse, educated, and wealthy to be “women friendly,” based on findings that white congresswomen tend to represent districts with these characteristics more often than their male counterparts.⁸ A district’s or city’s political environment—including its propensity to elect women generally—may also shape a female candidate’s perceptions of how voters, parties, and the media will respond to her campaign. For example, an analysis of election data from the 1970s found that women were more likely to run for the state legislature in states with a history of electing women to the state legislature.⁹ Many of the best-known and longest serving women legislators in Minnesota have represented urban constituencies. We therefore expected that women would be more likely to run in urban areas in Minnesota, where higher proportions of women were already serving in office, for many reasons: the larger pool of candidates with electoral experience in these areas, party organizations that were more accustomed to recruiting and supporting women, and voters who had demonstrated a willingness to elect women.

As we expected, we uncovered partisan differences in women’s candidacies and differences in the types of districts where women ran. Female candidates were significantly more likely to be Democrats overall. Contrary to our expectations, however, we found that among Democrats, women were most likely to run in suburban districts (45.4%) (Figure 4). This result was not simply an artifact of the high number of suburban districts in Minnesota. Although nearly half of Minnesota’s districts are categorized as suburban, we identified a 13.5% gap between the share of Democratic women (45.4%) and the share of Democratic men (31.9%) who ran in suburban districts. Democratic women also often ran in urban districts (24.3%), but not significantly more than Democratic men did

Figure 4. Minnesota State Legislative Candidates, Stratified by Type of District, 1997–2008



Note: Mixed district data are not included.

(21.4%). Our most striking finding was how infrequently Democratic women ran in rural districts (13.7% of Democratic women compared with 26.5% of Democratic men).

When we analyzed the data for Republican candidates, we found that Republican women were particularly likely to run in suburban districts (51.5%, compared with 39.2% of Republican men). Republican women were only slightly less likely than Republican men to compete in urban districts (16.0% versus 18.1%). Rural districts did not attract many women from either party; only 13.1% of Republican women (compared with 22.8% of Republican men) ran in a rural district. Overall, when we controlled for other predictors of candidacy, including education level in the district, presidential vote share, incumbency, number of candidates in the race, election year, and chamber, we found that women of either party were significantly less likely to run in rural districts than men. These results raised important questions for future research. Are rural voters less likely to support women? Do party gatekeepers in rural districts deter women candidates? Are women’s groups that recruit and fund women less likely to operate in rural areas?

We also wanted to assess whether women were less likely to run in districts that advantage their party. Early research on women as candidates for elective office indicated that

parties recruited women to be “sacrificial lambs” in unwinnable districts.¹⁰ More recent research at the federal level has shown that Republican men were more likely than women to run in districts that had voted Republican in the presidential election.¹¹ Our research on candidacy for the state legislature in Minnesota revealed the opposite, that women in both parties were more likely than their male counterparts to run in districts where the partisan makeup helps their candidacies. We found that DFL women competed in districts with a higher Democratic vote share (as measured by presidential vote in the year closest to the election) and Republican women ran where Republican presidential vote proportions were higher. Perhaps Minnesota’s party endorsement process attracts more conservative Republican women than emerge at the federal level, because to gain the endorsement in Minnesota one must prove one’s ideological credentials to a smaller, more knowledgeable party caucus audience. In sum, our results demonstrated that women in each party were more likely to run in favorable

⁸ See note 2 above.

⁹ D. Hill, “Political Culture and Female Political Representation,” *Journal of Politics* 43 (1981): 159–68.

¹⁰ S.J. Carroll, *Women as Candidates in American Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

¹¹ K. Pearson and E. McGhee, “Why Women Should Win More Often than Men: Reassessing Gender Bias in U.S. House Elections,” unpublished circulating manuscript, the University of Minnesota, 2008.

districts than men; they are party favorites, not sacrificial lambs.

Perceptions of Gender Advantage.

Women may win at rates equal to their male counterparts, but that does not mean that gender is irrelevant nor that discrimination no longer exists. Beyond analyzing the structural influences on elections themselves, we also wanted to determine candidates' perceptions of the electoral environment.

A recent Pew Foundation study showed that 4 in 10 people thought men hold women back in politics, although 48% of women held this view compared with 37% of men. Women may be more likely than men to perceive gender discrimination, for example, in the difficulty women candidates have being taken seriously, which may account for some reluctance to run. Biased treatment of women by the media has been well documented and was on display in the last presidential election. Although having women run for president and vice president may inspire some women, women also saw Hillary Clinton called horrible names by pundits, observed hecklers telling Clinton to "iron my shirts," and watched Sarah Palin's family life dissected.

Previous research has shown that, although women win congressional races at the same rate as men, women must have more experience and raise more money.¹² We could not discern with our Minnesota data whether women have to be better candidates and work harder to enjoy the same success as men. We must, therefore, take seriously the gender and partisan differences that emerged from our survey results. We found considerable partisan and regional variation in perceptions of women's candidacies, as we detail below.

The survey data we collected on the 2006 cohort of legislative candidates provided us with insight into gendered dynamics of Minnesota legislative elections that were not discernible from the candidate database. The rich survey data allowed us to analyze information about candidates' previous political experience, their decision to run for office, their experiences in the party

endorsement process, interest group involvement in their endorsement, their reasons for ending a campaign, and their opinions regarding which gender has an electoral advantage in campaigning. In this analysis, we focused on candidate perceptions of gender bias in legislative campaigns, with attention to regional and party variation.

We analyzed respondents' perceptions of a gender advantage in elections. Specifically, we asked whether men, women, or neither have an advantage in legislative campaigns. We controlled for incumbency status, running in a rural

district, running in an urban district, the level of Republican partisanship in the district (as measured by vote share for George W. Bush in the 2004 election), and a variable indicating whether or not the respondent believed their political beliefs were in sync with that of their district. These results indicated that, all else being equal, Democratic women perceived an electoral disadvantage for women. This finding was particularly striking considering our earlier findings of electoral success for Democratic women during the past 11 years. Although our longitudinal data supported a finding of gender neutrality



Minnesota state representative Denise Dittrich (DFL-Champlin).

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¹² K. Pearson and E. McGhee, "Why Women Should Win More Often than Men: Reassessing Gender Bias in U.S. House Elections," unpublished circulating manuscript, the University of Minnesota, 2008; and B. Burrell, "Campaign Finance: Women's Experience in the Modern Era," in S. Thomas and C. Wilcox (editors), *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

(or, in some cases, women's advantage), our survey results indicated that Democratic women were unlikely to perceive this process as one that favored them. Our survey findings also reinforced our earlier findings regarding regional variation. The women we surveyed were less likely to run in, and win in, rural districts. It is not surprising, then, that candidates in rural districts were more likely to perceive that men have an advantage in electoral politics.

In another model we used, compared with Democratic men (our base category), we found that both Republican women and Republican men were significantly more likely to perceive that women have an electoral advantage. Republican women were particularly likely to perceive an advantage for women. Democratic women, however, were significantly less likely to perceive an advantage for women. The majority of Democratic men believe that neither men nor women have an advantage, and among those respondents who perceived a gender advantage, more Democratic men thought that women have an advantage over men. We need to explore further why DFL women believe they are disadvantaged.

Interestingly, incumbents (men and women) were significantly more likely to think that women have an advantage, controlling for rural and urban district status, incumbency, and presidential vote share. Those candidates who have already experienced, and triumphed in, the electoral process—and gone on to observe women succeed inside the legislature as well—believed that women have an advantage, all else being equal.

Conclusion

Research on women's candidacies has generally focused on the U.S. Congress. We analyzed women's path to the Minnesota state legislature with particular attention to unique features of Minnesota legislative elections, especially the preprimary party endorsement process. We systematically analyzed

gender differences in electoral competition and outcomes at every stage in legislative races from 1997 to 2008.

We found some encouraging news suggesting that women candidates for elected office were making progress toward equality. When women ran for elected office in Minnesota, they won at the same or higher rates than men. We looked carefully to see if women disproportionately failed to secure their party's endorsement, were more likely to be challenged or defeated in primaries, or were running in less winnable seats. We found that at various stages in the process, women actually outperformed men. For example, Republican women were significantly more likely to win their primaries than Republican men. DFL women had a clear edge in fundraising, outraising all other candidates. Women's groups that raise money through political action committee contributions and bundling for pro-choice women candidates in Minnesota have largely closed the funding gap between men and women. Our data, however, cannot tell us whether to achieve these outcomes women candidates had to make twice as many calls, for example, to raise the same amount of money as men, or whether they needed to be better candidates to win.

Our aggregate results masked important variations in the types of districts and races in which women compete and succeed. Democratic women candidates outnumber Republican women by a nearly 2-to-1 margin. Republican women's electoral success is rooted in the overwhelming success of Republican women Senate candidates, who won at a rate of 63.5% from 1997 to 2008. Republican women running for the House, on the other hand, only won 42.4% of the time. We have yet to explain these differences. We also found important regional variation. Women in rural areas were significantly less likely than men to run for office, a finding that calls for further research.

When women run in Minnesota, women win. But the number of women

legislative candidates is too low to ensure great progress in women's representation. More women candidates must enter the electoral arena, particularly in rural areas of Minnesota, if Minnesota is ever to reach gender equality in its state legislature.

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