Gender in Politics: A Comparative Study of Female Representation in the New York State Senate

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Gender in Politics: A Comparative Study of Female Representation in the New York State Senate

An honor’s thesis presented to the Department of Public Administration and Policy University at Albany, State University Of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Public Policy and Management and graduation from The Honors College.

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March, 2018
Abstract

This paper utilizes data obtained from the New York State Senate spanning five elections between 2008 and 2016 to determine if gender impacts election outcomes. More specifically, I attempt to understand if the New York State Senate matches the common belief in the literature that women tend to fare less well than men in elections, and female Democrats have greater success than female Republicans in winning elections. By focusing on the New York State Senate, I seek to uncover whether the idiosyncrasies of New York State politics are reflected in any distinctions from the prominent conclusions made in the literature which utilize meta-analyses of several state legislatures.

This paper uses linear regression models with controls including incumbency status, campaign funding, number of donors, year and district fixed effects as well as gender and political party interactions in order to discover an association between gender and election success. The strongest finding conveys that women Democrats tend to win New York State Senate elections less often than all other candidates.
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Introduction

Women have lacked equitable representation in government since the founding of America’s democracy. Although women have held the right to vote for over a century, they currently hold a minority of state senate seats—just 22.6% nationwide in 2018 (Center for American Women and Politics, 2018). Early suffragists battled tirelessly to secure women’s right to vote—a single aspect of political participation. The struggle for gender equality in government has proven to be multifaceted, as the disparity between male and female politicians persists today.

Scholarly research has argued that women representatives are important because they tend to advocate for policies that benefit and advance the interests of women (Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009). This is seen in analyses of state legislatures, with female politicians typically favoring feminist agendas in education, health, and welfare policy—areas that women often support (Swers, 2001). However, women face an uphill battle in getting elected to political office, often filled with more obstacles than male candidates. The difficulties women candidates encounter in political elections create a barrier in assuring that women’s rights issues are tackled in the policy arena. This research seeks to determine if the lack of female representation in the New York State Senate is an institutional problem, and if gender puts women candidates at a disadvantage.

It is indisputable that there are countless factors that impact a candidate’s chance of winning an election for political office. The body of research exploring elements that affect the outcome of elections is vast and diverse, addressing specific issues such as redistricting, voter turnout, candidate background, and campaign finance. This paper delves into the influence of gender, incumbency status, and campaign funding on election outcomes in the New York State
Senate. These determinants were selected based on consensus of literature discussing political election outcomes, while considering what data would be easily obtained and quantified.

While an expansive body of research has been established studying congressional elections, analyses of state legislature elections are limited. Academic research of New York State Legislature elections is even more difficult to come by. This gap in the literature requires attention because findings for federal elections are not always applicable to state legislature elections and, at the same time, research for state legislatures in general may not account for the distinctions of the New York State Legislature. Focusing on elections in the New York State Senate allows for even further narrowing and limiting of natural variation, as the Senate and Assembly are very unique entities.

It is important to note a brief description of the history of the New York State Legislature and its politics to better understand the implications of this research. The processes of the New York State Legislature are guided by the state’s Constitution, which was adopted in 1777 (Kellogg, 2011). The New York State Constitution is a living document, meaning that it can be changed and modified to suit the updates associated with modernity. The New York State Legislature is divided into two houses similarly to the structure of the United States Congress, with the Senate being the upper chamber with 63 members currently and the Assembly being the lower chamber with 150 members (Kellogg, 2011).

The New York State Legislature is considered a professional legislature, with most officials working as full-time politicians and relying on the income from this position, and often retaining their role for lengthy periods. Many states across the United States have professional legislatures, including California. Stonecash finds that New York State legislators hold their positions for longer periods not because of higher salaries or greater availability of legislative
resources making reelection easier, and that the justification is likely more complex (1993). The partisan makeup of the New York State Legislature is also significant, with the Assembly being for long while dominated by Democrats and Senate often evenly divided, with the majority party holding a slim advantage, which currently is held by Republicans (Schneier & Murtaugh, 2010). This information is valuable in analysis of New York State Senate elections, because it reflects how electable certain candidates are- for example, Democrats often are easily elected to the Assembly but encounter more difficulties in State Senate races.

The idiosyncrasies of New York State politics present an interesting framework for studying the influence of gender in elections. The fact that the New York State Assembly consists of substantially more representatives than the State Senate and that the Assembly is often controlled by Democrats may lead us to believe that women are more electable in this house, because women Democrats typically earn more support than women Republicans. Conversely, the Senate’s small composition likely fuels competition, which may push women out of contention. Incumbency and campaign funding generate yet more factors that influence election outcomes. This research attempts to determine if there is a significant deficiency of women representatives in the New York State Senate, and whether incumbency status and campaign funding exacerbate this problem.

**Literature Review**

This research seeks to understand the dynamics of gender in winning New York State Senate elections. While the literature neglects to answer this question with regards to the New York State Senate specifically, there are numerous studies addressing the topic of gender in elections. Fulton’s analysis refutes the commonly accepted idea that dominated gender-politics research for decades- that gender does not play a role in general elections, and men and women
tend to have similar outcomes (2014). Literature advancing the theory that gender does not matter in elections did not take into account the impact of non-policy “valence” characteristics of candidates, in other words, traits such as integrity, competence, or problem-solving skills, on voter preferences (Fulton, 2014). When both policy and valence are factored into voter trends for candidates of both genders, women tend to fare less well than men in elections (Fulton, 2014). That is, when valence is held constant, women receive 3% less votes than men in Congressional general elections (Fulton, 2014).

The implications of this study are resounding, as women must surpass men in voters’ interpretations of valence traits like trustworthiness, collaboration skills, and adaptability in order to secure an election. This can prove to be an elusive goal to obtain, as these characteristics are subjective and defined differently by any given individual. It also presents a real dilemma for ambitious and successful women. High power COO of Facebook and leading woman of the Silicon Valley Sheryl Sandberg points out the complications women face when advancing in their careers; the more successful a woman becomes, the more she is disliked (Sandberg, 2013). Women must therefore strike a nearly perfect balance between success and likability when running for political office, as both are crucial elements in winning an election. If a woman is seen as “too successful” she runs the risk of being viewed as out of touch and cut-throat, and if she is not successful enough but regarded as friendly and trustworthy, she may not be taken seriously.

Kira Sanbonmatsu and Kathleen Dolan tackle the issue of gender stereotypes through the political lens (2009). They find that both men and women tend to be linked to specific policy areas based on gender biases of personality traits. Women, for example, are expected to be more warm, expressive, and friendly, and therefore, better suited to address compassion issues such as
education (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). Men are thought to be assertive and tough, and therefore better at executing military operations and policies to deter crime (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). This prejudice often benefits women Democrats, biases about their gender match liberal values, but can hurt women Republicans who are often viewed as “not conservative enough.” In this way, preconceived ideologies based on gender can have a significant impact on election outcomes.

Gender dynamics has become a prime concern in response to the 2016 presidential election. This was one of the most unique elections the United States has seen, as Hillary Clinton, the first female nominee for the highest position in the country faced a political outsider in Donald Trump. Despite Hillary Clinton’s extensive political experience as First Lady of the United States, Senator representing New York for 8 years, and Secretary of State under President Barack Obama, she was defeated by Donald Trump, who had no political experience. The dialogue attempting to decipher what happened in this election continues, as polls and consensus among media elites and political pundits alike agreed that Clinton would be the victor.

The issue of sexism was raised not only in the public’s perception of Hillary Clinton, but in now President Donald Trump’s rhetoric throughout his campaign. A recent study found that levels of voter’s sexism, attitudes towards women, and gender role attitudes influenced voter outcomes in the 2016 presidential election (Bock, Byrd-Craven & Burkley, 2017). Although political party was the strongest predictor of votes in this study, significant correlations were found in greater sexism and traditional attitudes towards women and voting for Donald Trump (Bock, Byrd-Craven & Burkley, 2017). This sexism may have undermined Hillary Clinton while simultaneously boosting Donald Trump, as many voters may have found his sexist campaign rhetoric appealing and aligning with their own traditional views of women.
Hillary Clinton may also have been a victim of Sandberg’s theory that successful women tend to be disliked, as she received criticism from both sides of the political spectrum. Clinton does not come across as the warm and sensitive woman Sanbonmatsu & Dolan argue that voters tend to associate with women candidates (2009). She would align more with how voters expect men to behave, being assertive and strong (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). Clinton’s “masculine” character traits may have made voters uncomfortable, as she does not fit the mold created by gender norms. As Fulton found, women must exceed men with such non-policy valence characteristics in order to win an election (2014). In Clinton’s case, valence traits and the sabotage of sexism were likely her downfall.

Another aspect that may contribute to the deficiency of women politicians is the influence of political party and recruitment. While the recruiting process takes place prior to elections, it is important to note because if women are not on the ballot to begin with, then a disparity will continue in elected women politicians. Sanbonmatsu argues that Democratic and Republican women have different incentive structures in running for state legislature, therefore gender and party exert influence in what candidates choose to run for office (2002). Her study found that when a political party holds more sway in primary nominations, women are recruited to run at lesser rates than men, and there is no relationship with female recruitment for the opposite party (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). This is especially the case when the party holds the majority, and therefore races are more competitive (Sanbonmatsu, 2002).

Researchers point to recruitment as a potential factor that depresses women’s participation in government. A study by Fox and Lawless contends that highly qualified and well-connected women are less likely to be recruited to run for office than men in similar positions (Fox & Lawless, 2010). This exclusion leads to women’s disengagement and
suppresses their political ambition, generating an even deeper disadvantage for achieving gender
equality in political representation. Men also tend to be more self-motivated in the decision to
run for office, as they are consciously aware and confident that they would be a good political
candidate, while women typically are persuaded by others in the decision to run (Carroll &
Sanbonmatsu, 2013). For women, running for office is a “relationally-embedded decision,” come
to after encouragement from others and thorough consideration of its impact on others (Carroll &
Sanbonmatsu, 2013). The implications of these disadvantages for women politicians produce a
constant circle, in which women are recruited at lesser rates than men to run for office, feel less
suited to run and do not make the decision to run on their own, and therefore do not win
elections, leaving women with less representation in politics.

An additional factor to consider in evaluating general election outcomes is incumbency
status. Studies convey that incumbency plays a significant role in state legislature elections, as
incumbents tend to win at greater rates than their opponents and by larger margins (Breaux,
1990). This finding has remained consistent and been researched in depth since, seeking to
discover more variables in impacts of incumbency on political candidates. In a more recent
study, Hogan found that challenged incumbents in 14 state legislature races between 1996 and
1998 received about 63 percent of the vote and 93 percent were reelected (2004). This research
contends that legislative professionalism is critical in determining whether incumbents have a
greater probability of winning than challengers, with more professional legislatures having a
greater chance of a challenger emerging, and incumbents ultimately more likely to defeat said
challengers (Hogan, 2004). Professional legislatures like New York State’s are composed of full-
time politicians that are highly compensated compared to citizen legislatures, and therefore races
are more competitive. However, Hogan’s study finds that incumbents are often better equipped, whether it be financially or through connections, to win elections than challengers (2004).

Another analysis of the lower house of state legislatures in 45 states reinforced the incumbency advantage, while adding another glimpse at impacts on opponents (Uppal, 2010). The incumbent’s edge also serves as a deterrent to challengers, establishing a barrier for those that have been defeated by an incumbent in a previous election to enter another race (Uppal, 2010). The implications of this are severe, as highly qualified candidates may lose to candidates not based on merit, but because they could not match the resources that incumbents reap, and become discouraged and choose a different path to follow. In turn, a deficiency of well-qualified individuals may be willing to run for political office, as in their eyes, the stakes of running against an incumbent may be too high to risk putting their career on hold.

Incumbents’ experience as lawmakers creates a distinction for voters to consider at the polls. Incumbents have the opportunity to prove themselves as capable of serving their constituency by sponsoring and advocating for legislation that will benefit their communities, while challengers must find different methods to demonstrate their competency. The ability for constituents to monitor their representative’s actions in office can manifest a sizable advantage for incumbents, or can be their downfall (Hogan, Kramer & Wrzenski, 2016). In state legislatures, higher ratios of bill passage lead to fewer challenges in primaries for incumbents, and decreases the chance of facing well-financed opponents in the general election (Hogan, Kramer & Wrzenski, 2016). Incumbents who introduce more bills also receive greater shares of the vote in general elections (Hogan, Kramer & Wrzenski, 2016). In sum, incumbents do not necessarily win solely because they are incumbents, and that voters respond to lawmaking activities of their representatives as well.
The impact of voters’ perception of an incumbent’s activity in office puts added pressure for achievement. While Hogan, Kramer & Wrzenski point out that this influence may be small in the grand scheme of elections, it is a mechanism challengers can use to their advantage (2016). In other words, due to the high competition in professional legislatures, incumbents often face highly qualified candidates, and cannot necessarily float through session with limited accomplishments and win reelection just by using their advantage as an incumbent. Competitors are often effective at finding an incumbent’s weaknesses and exploiting them for their own gain, which forces incumbents to work diligently in lawmaking activities (Sulkin, 2005). An incumbent who does not dedicate his or her time in office to affecting change that will benefit the lives of their constituents runs the risk of being challenged by tough competitors and questioned by voters that want to see that their representative is achieving important feats.

Incumbents have the opportunity to connect and engage with their constituents easily throughout their time in office. Research seeking to determine the impact of incumbents participating in a dialogue with constituents on electoral outcomes has produced conflicting results, some studies finding no relationship and others discovering strong correlations (Dropp & Peskowitz, 2012). Constituent engagement creates another distinction between incumbents and challengers seeking election. Incumbents have quick and convenient access to communicate with their constituents readily, while challengers may find it more difficult to reach out to individuals in the communities they hope to represent. Ashworth argues that incumbents can utilize constituent service, which can take the form of individuals that reach out to their representatives for assistance with a diverse spectrum of problems to manipulate voter learning (2005). As a result, voter learning can influence selections at the polls (Ashworth, 2005). In contrast, another study finds that a negative relationship between reelection and constituent service exists, with
incumbents that win reelection providing less direct assistance to their constituents (Dropp & Peskowitz, 2012). It remains unclear whether constituent service influences election outcomes, but it is important to note that this is an opportunity that allows incumbents to communicate with voters that challengers do not possess.

Campaign funding can exert a critical force on election outcomes. While the effects of spending vary due to the idiosyncrasies and context of different elections, it is understood that money plays an important role in political campaigns. Seabrooke attempts to determine a comprehensive account of the relationship between money and votes in state legislative elections (2010). This significant contribution finds that “the percentage of registered independents in a district, the presence or absence of term limits on legislators, and the level of professionalism of a legislature each significantly condition the impact of money” (Seabrooke, 2010). This knowledge can assist candidates in formulating campaign strategies, for example, they must decide whether they should use their funds to target independents in the district or appeal to their base to mobilize more voters. These findings also convey that more professional legislatures use campaign spending more effectively, as they often have advanced methods to target and mobilize voters. It is essential for candidates to spend their campaign money strategically and effectively in order to secure their triumph.

Campaign professionalism, which is when candidates employ a high level of resources while running for office, is a key variable to address within the discussion of campaign spending. Candidates must decide whether to hire professional staffers- usually direct mail or mass media experts, pollsters, or campaign managers- to assist in maximizing their probability of winning the election (Abbe & Herrnson, 2003). In their analysis, Abbe and Herrnson find that incumbents utilize the most campaign professionals, followed by candidates for open seats (2003). This is an
easily deciphered finding, as incumbents often have the most financial resources in seeking reelection, and therefore can use their funding to hire professionals to help run their campaign. However, challengers hire more professionals per dollar spent than both incumbents and open-seat candidates in states with professionalized legislatures (Abbe & Herrnson, 2003). This could be explained by the fact that challengers usually have less funding than incumbents and must allocate their money as sufficiently as possible and hiring a professional could have the greatest benefit to their campaign, as they often go into a race at a disadvantage when facing an incumbent.

Hogan’s research on the relationship between campaign spending and voter participation in 20 states over two election cycles reinforces the idea that money matters in elections (2013). Campaign funds allow candidates to hire professionals that try to attract as many votes as possible, which often enhances voter participation in elections. Although there are innumerable factors that correlate with voter participation, including education, income, age, and competitiveness of a race, when several of these and other variables are held constant, campaign spending is consistently a robust predictor of voter turnout (Hogan, 2013). Campaign spending for state legislatures is also found to have no less influence during a high stakes presidential or gubernatorial year, which can often divert attention from local elections (Hogan, 2013). Instead, campaign funds for state legislature candidates are more influential in a high-stimulus statewide election (Hogan, 2013). This perhaps could be explained by the fact that turnout will already be higher in presidential, gubernatorial, or congressional election years, and that voters will inform themselves of candidates for state legislatures before voting because they already plan to hit the polls. Therefore, state legislature candidates that spend more money through mail, online, or
television advertisements may be more effective in getting the public exposed to the candidate’s background and positions, and ultimately earn more votes.

Legislative professionalism serves as a lurking variable in analyzing the effects of campaign spending on voter participation. In states with less professional legislatures, money appears to have greater significance in spurring voter turnout, likely because there is reduced prevalence of professional campaigns in these legislatures, therefore, when campaign funds are used, they have a resounding impact (Hogan, 2013). This also points to the issue of incumbency, as incumbents often do not need to spend as much money as challengers in professional legislatures to be reelected due to the multitude of advantages they already possess as an incumbent (Hogan, 2013). While the presence of an incumbent increases the percentage that casts ballots in an election, challengers face a disadvantage in that they must often mobilize new voters and incumbents simply must “remobilize” constituents that have already voted for them in previous elections (Hogan, 2013). In this way, challengers must spend more campaign funds to attract new voters, and incumbents often only need to remind voters that have previously supported them to come out to the polls, which costs little to no money at all.

A crucial element to consider in analyzing campaign spending and electoral outcomes is the role of campaign finance laws. Candidate-level, district-level, and state-level variation exerts a powerful influence over who will win an election. However, when controlling for many of these components in state legislature campaigns, Hogan found that contribution limits and public funding policies have an impact on campaign spending, but this impact is moderate (2000). Both these policies reduce incumbent spending and public funding leads to increases in challenger spending (Hogan, 2000). This is notable because campaign finance laws seek to level the playing field and allow challengers to compete more effectively against incumbents. While these controls
do appear to have a moderate effect in lowering incumbent spending, the numerous advantages incumbents hold will often neutralize this. As previously noted, incumbents do not need to spend as much money as challengers to mobilize voters, therefore the moderate reduction of funds campaign finance laws may cause for incumbents will more often than not be inconsequential (Hogan, 2013).

Gender, incumbency status, and campaign funding are critical variables that can have considerable effects on election outcomes. These factors also exert notable influence on each other, and can be analyzed jointly. While gender and incumbency status are considered binary—either a candidate is a male or female, or an incumbent or challenger—these elements can be examined together to determine correlations. For example, questions such as “do female candidates receive equal campaign funding as male candidates?” or “do incumbents receive more campaign funding than challengers?” can be looked at. Even more complex questions can be posed, including “do female incumbents receive less funding than male challengers?” or even “do women tend to be incumbents seeking reelection as often as men?”. For the purposes of this paper, gender, incumbency status, and campaign funding were selected because they are prominent variables in analyzing state legislature election outcomes, with gender being a topic of deficient research in New York State political research.

Hogan explores one of these combinations by focusing on the relationship between candidate gender and campaign spending in state legislature races (2007). In analysis of candidates in 20 state legislatures over two election cycles, it is determined that men and women utilize similar amounts of funding while seeking election (Hogan, 2007). With several controls being held constant, the only distinctions found in this research relate to incumbency status, as women incumbents had a slight spending disadvantage than men and women challengers had a
slight advantage in spending compared to male challengers (Hogan, 2007). This statistical finding may mean that women incumbents do not receive as much financial support from their parties as men in seeking reelection, which was touched on in analysis above of women in government. The spending advantage that women challengers experience may come from the existence of political action committees that support women candidates in their endeavors to achieve election to office.

The vast body of literature addressing electoral outcomes tends to argue that women win less often than men, incumbents win more often than challengers, and campaign funding has little impact on incumbents, but can help challengers mobilize new voters. Most research utilizes compiled data from several state legislatures over multiple election cycles, attempting to find common trends from large sets of data. Research looking solely at variables affecting electoral outcomes in the New York State Legislature is minimal. While meta-analyses are important in finding tendencies for state legislatures, the variability of each state’s legislature may have its own unique algorithm. This paper seeks to analyze data from the New York State Senate to determine women’s path to election, and whether this differs from trends found from literature that extrapolates to all state legislatures.

Data

This research seeks to determine if gender affects electoral outcomes in the New York State Senate, while also looking into the influence of incumbency status and campaign funding. I compiled data from Ballotpedia, a website that records candidates seeking election for every election and information for each individual including political party and incumbency status. I utilized Follow the Money, a site that collects campaign finance information for every political candidate, to find total campaign funding and number of donors for each candidate. I collected
data for candidates in races for the New York State Senate from 2008 to 2016, which covers 5 election cycles, excluding special elections. I collected the year and district number as well as the candidate’s name, party, incumbency status, gender, campaign funding total, and total number of donors for every district in the time frame between 2008 and 2016.

The descriptive statistics from this study support the consensus found in the literature review: women are elected to political office at lesser rates than men. First, like the literature suggests, more men than women run for office. Of 603 candidates that vied for a seat in the New York State Senate in general elections between 2008 and 2016, 481 were male and 122 were women. This is equivalent to about an 80 percent male dominance in New York State Senate candidates, compared to 20 percent females running for this office.

But do women who run for office win at similar rates? There was a total of 313 candidates that won elections, with 256 being male and 57 being female. Therefore, the elected body of State Senators between 2008 and 2016 was approximately 82 percent male and 18 percent female. These statistics convey that there is an even greater proportion of male candidates that go on to win their elections compared to the overall proportion of men that choose to run for State Senate. There were 288 candidates that did not win their contended race, made up of 223 men and 65 women. This shows that of those that lost their elections, about 77 percent were male and 23 percent were female.
The data also show that the proportion of Democrats and Republicans running were roughly equal, with 42 percent Democrats and 43 percent Republicans. Third parties were not calculated for the purpose of this research, but the candidates were included, as many candidates that lost in the primaries appeared on the ballot for the general election under a third party.

Of all 601 candidates, roughly half were incumbents. However, the proportions of incumbents among the winners and losers in New York State Senate elections is critical to understanding the advantage incumbents experience. Of candidates elected to the New York State Senate, about 85 percent were incumbents, and of those that lost their elections 6 percent were incumbents. Conversely, 54 percent of all candidates were challengers, with 15 percent of winners being challengers and 97 percent of losers being challengers. The overlap in the statistics for those that lost their elections likely is caused by cases in which multiple candidates challenge an incumbent in a general election via third parties and lose, causing challengers’ proportion of losers to rise.
The average total campaign funding for a candidate was $352,851, coming from an average of 446 donors. However, there were many outliers with this parameter. A total of 102 candidates had $0 in campaign funding. On the other hand, there were 52 candidates that raised over $1,000,000 in campaign funding. This range conveys that there is great variability in how much money candidates are able to secure for their campaigns.
**Results**

To analyze the dynamics of women’s experience in the political realm, I test a number of correlations in order to determine statistically significant relationships. While these correlations can provide important information, they must only be viewed as a precursor in which a regression model can explain in more detail with greater accuracy.

As one of the most critical elements of an election, political party plays a vital role in how citizens vote. To substantiate whether gender influences political outcomes, we must compare the incidence of women Democrats winning an election versus women Republicans. The literature argues that women Republicans tend to face more obstacles in securing public office than women Democrats (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). My research shows that there is a small disadvantage for women Democrats winning in the New York State Senate, however, it is statistically inconsequential. While this is a surprising result, the correlation conveys just the relationship between the two variables and cannot include independent effects of any specific factor.

To build on the association between gender and political party, we must look at the dynamics within each party. As discussed previously, women tend to be judged through a harsher lens, therefore they may fare less well than men within their party. I find that women Democrats tend to win at a slightly lesser rate than men Democrats (correlation coefficient: -0.1091) with statistical significance at the 10% level (p-value: .0769). This is consistent with my previous, although insignificant, result that women Democrats win less often than women Republicans. In analysis of the Republican Party, women have a slight disadvantage than men in winning elections, but the result is insignificant. Results for women third party candidates versus men third party candidate show no correlation.
Being an incumbent can also prove to be an advantage in elections, as incumbents have more tools to obtain votes, whether it is financial support or constituent connections (Hogan, 2004). My results convey that there is no significant relationship between gender and being an incumbent. Including political party as well as gender can help illustrate whether an incumbency advantage exists. I find no relationship between women Democrats being incumbents versus women Republicans being incumbents. There is no bearing in gender within the Democratic Party or third party candidates in being an incumbent. However, there is a slight correlation between women Republicans and male Republicans being an incumbent, with women Republicans being less likely to obtain incumbency status than men (correlation coefficient: -.111) at the 10% significance level (p-value: .0768). This adds another mystery to the findings, suggesting that while women Democrats may have a harder time winning elections than male Democrats, women Republicans encounter more hurdles than men Republicans in earning incumbency status and seeking reelection.

However, because these correlations serves as only a preliminary result, they must be regarded with skepticism. Without controlling for potentially influential variables, it is challenging to discover unbiased relationships, and therefore almost impossible to ascertain conceivable roots for the results. For example, the correlation comparing women and men Democrats did not control for incumbency status, campaign funding, or number of donors. Justifying the correlation showing that women Democrats win less often than men Democrats becomes problematic, because these independent variables could have a confounding effect on the results. A linear regression model holds for lurking variables that can undermine results, and represents a stronger indicator for election outcomes.
In order to better understand election outcomes, I conducted linear regression analysis. The first models were simple, looking at bivariate relationships without any controls. This model was utilized in analyzing women Democrats compared to all other candidates, by including an interaction term for being a woman and a Democrat. I also estimated linear regressions for incumbency status with these relationships. Each model utilized robust standard errors clustered by district in order to address heteroskedasticity and multicollinearity.

Next, I used a linear regression model with year fixed effects for the same correlations, followed by a model controlling for incumbency, campaign funding, and number of donors for winning elections, and excluded the incumbency control for the associations determining relationships with incumbency status. Finally, the strongest linear regression model included the previous controls while also adding a fixed effect for district. All models use robust standard errors, clustered by district in order to address heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. After examining the results of each test, I narrowed my focus on outcomes that were statistically significant. The strongest relationship found conveyed that women Democrats tend to win less often than other candidates. In the model that controlled for year and district fixed effects as well as incumbency, campaign funding, and number of donors, women Democrats typically win 18.8 percent less often than other candidates at the 5% significance level, evident in column 4 of Table 1.
Table 1 shows the results from linear regressions assessing the relationship between election rates of women Democrats and all other candidates. The first column (1) conveys the simple regression, comparing the probability of women and all other candidates winning elections without controls. This model conveyed an insignificant result of women Democrats winning elections compared to other candidates. The next column (2) shows a linear regression with just year fixed effects, which had insignificant outcomes. However, when controls for incumbency status, campaign funding, and number of donors were added to the year fixed effects, the results show a negative relationship between women Democrats and other candidates in elections at the 1% significance level, seen in column 3 of Table 1. Finally, the model that
included controls as well as year and district fixed effects conveyed that women Democrats win less often than men at the 5% significance level.

Discussion

The strongest linear regression outcome compared the probability of women Democrats and all other candidates winning elections. I will focus on this result primarily. As conveyed in Table 1, women Democrats won elections at lesser rates than other candidates with statistical significance in the simplified model- which controls for incumbency, campaign funding, and number of donors and utilizes year fixed effects- as well as the model with the previous controls in addition to a district fixed effects. Because the model with independent variable controls in combination with year and district fixed effects reduces the most bias of those tested, it is notable to find a significant result at the 5% significance level. The finding that women Democrats win elections less often than others is both powerful and surprising.

One significant finding from my data suggests that Democratic women tend to win elections less often than other candidates. This result is surprising because, to be consistent with the literature, the correlations would have conveyed a significant correlation with women Democrats having a greater likelihood of being elected than women Republicans, which my results did not portray. Sanbonmatsu & Dolan assert that gender biases tend to benefit women Democrats, who tend to be viewed as approachable and empathetic, traits that go hand-in-hand with liberal values such as education (2009). On the other hand, Republicans regard women as weak and unable to tackle tough issues that conservatives stand for, including crime and military operations (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). My finding is interesting, as it does not support this theory, showing that women Democrats are less successful than others in elections. In other
words, male Democrats, as well as female and male Republicans, get elected to the New York State Senate more often than female Democrats.

There could be a number of explanations for this association. This could be the trickle-down effect of redistricting that occurred in 2012, when Republicans held the majority in the New York State Senate. Many districts were gerrymandered in order to boost Republicans in elections by targeting areas with demographics that match their voter base. This would give Republicans an advantage in elections, therefore creating an even more arduous path to victory for women Democrats. Some districts do not even run a Democrat or provide financial support for Democratic candidates, because it would be a nearly impossible endeavor for a liberal to win in a district dominated by conservatives.

In this case, the conservative base of State Senate districts would be weary to vote for Democrats, and their preference towards males they associate as strong on issues they are passionate about could negatively impact women Democrats (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). Republicans would likely ostracize women Democrats, believing that they are even more liberal than their male counterparts, therefore hurting these women’s chances of winning in conservative leaning districts.

One would expect that as a liberal state, Democrats seeking election in New York would experience an easy path to earning public office. In reality, the political makeup of New York is diverse- both liberal and conservative pockets exist across the state. Politicians exploit this fact through the process of gerrymandering, in which they redraw districts to produce districts that will support candidates in their political party. Republicans may create boundaries that include rural, blue collar areas that tend to contain their voter base. On the other hand, Democrats may draw lines to include cities with high proportions of minorities that typically support their party.
Because New York State Senate districts were redrawn when the body was controlled by Republicans, most districts are likely composed of a majority Republican voter base. Therefore, the finding that women Democrats are elected less often than men Democrats may not be as surprising as first thought. Because conservative districts are wary of Democratic candidates, they may perceive women Democrats as more liberal than their male counterparts, and therefore an even greater threat to their values. Women tend to be associated with certain policy issues, including education, social services, and reproductive rights (Swers, 2001). Republican voters likely consider women representatives as a risk to principles they are passionate about.

Research has addressed the effects of “racial redistricting”, the process in which concentrations of minority voters are placed in a few districts, finding that this practice promotes liberal policy outcomes in southern Congressional elections (Shotts, 2003). This is because Democrats tend to be elected in districts with greater proportions of minority voters, therefore causing a shift to the left on the political spectrum. However, the same study determines that racial gerrymandering for a single state legislature or a liberal state’s U.S. House representatives result in conservative policy outcomes (Shotts, 2003). This contradiction may exist because minority voter turnout may be lesser in state legislature elections than federal elections. The finding that racial redistricting causes greater conservative policy outcomes in liberal states, however, is more elusive. The district fixed effects used in my model should control for differences of average racial makeup in each district, therefore this should not be a source of bias. It is important to note, though, the impacts and ethical dilemmas involved in racial redistricting, and gerrymandering in general. Gerrymandering can result in voter suppression, as the inequity of district makeup may lead to unfair and unrepresentative elections.
The lack of women Democrats elected to the State Senate may stem from redistricting that produced conservatively dominated State Senate districts. While the model with district fixed effects controls for differences in political composition of each district, if most district contains a predominantly Republican majority, this would transcend the fixed effects. Therefore, the gerrymandering effect could put Democrats, especially women Democrats, at a disadvantage in winning elections.

Chen & Cottrell find that gerrymandering creates more Republican-leaning Congressional districts in states controlled by Republicans and more Democratic-leaning Congressional districts in states controlled by Democrats (2016). They go on to argue that this phenomenon sways partisan outcomes in Congressional elections in some states (Chen & Cottrell, 2016). This finding may be applicable to State legislative elections, however, there is a deficiency of research addressing gerrymandering effects in the New York State Legislature. If this argument holds true in the New York State Legislature, it may explain why women Democrats find it difficult to win a seat in the State Senate. Gerrymandering during a Republican controlled State Senate year would create districts more conducive for producing Republican wins, hampering opportunities for women Democrats to win elections, as they are viewed as more liberal than men Democrats and therefore unattractive to a Republican voter base.

**Limitations**

The lack of quantitative research analyzing the New York State Legislature specifically necessitates extrapolation from studies conducted through meta-analyses of state legislatures across the United States or focused on Congressional elections. Therefore, theories may not be applicable to New York State, as it has its own unique political culture and institutions. This
paper utilized journal articles in analysis and theorizing justifications of the political environment women in the New York State Senate experience.

My findings were inconsistent with literature assessing the federal sphere, in which women Republicans tend to be less successful than women Democrats. My model did not convey a significant relationship between women Republicans and Democrats, however, it did find that women Democrats win elections less often than all other candidates. This contradicts the literature, as women Democrats tend to do well in elections generally. Because there is a lack of research on the New York State Legislature, it is unknown whether findings from federal studies or State Legislature meta-analyses would be applicable.

Another limitation is the lack of publicly available information that could be included as controls in linear regressions. While the district fixed effects can control for the average differences in district composition, it does not account for changes within a district. For example, if there was a significant increase in poverty in a year, this would not be fully included in the fixed effect. Without access to voter information, including demographics, political party, and income distribution that could be created as independent variables, it can be difficult to address bias in the model.

The shortage of publicly available data confined the sample size for this research. Because I had to collect the data by hand, and it was extracted from sites that do not have extensive archived information, I was limited to five elections. This restricts the opportunity for more representative data.

Overall, the methods used in this research allows for the introduction of bias. However, corrections were made in order to minimize bias through the use of a number of controls and fixed effects. To my knowledge, this is the first study of its kind in compiling and analyzing data
from the New York State Senate. Future research could endeavor to determine the relationship between women and campaign funding in the New York State Senate, and its impacts on winning elections, as well as the influence of race in New York State Senate elections.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to uncover the experiences of women in New York State Senate elections by comparing election rates between women and men. The literature conveys that women tend to encounter many obstacles in endeavoring on political campaigns in both state legislature and federal elections. Gender biases appear to be entrenched in the election process, as many voters subconsciously or purposefully consider character traits and values associated with gender in selecting a candidate (Fulton, 2014; Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). This can undermine credible women seeking election to the New York State Senate, as they are assumed to be liberals that stand strong on issues including education and health care, and weak on conservative issues such as crime and military.

With data collected from five New York State Senate elections between 2008 and 2016, I analyzed relationships between women and men winning races while controlling for a number of factors, including incumbency status, campaign funding, number of donors, and in the strongest model, year and district fixed effects. The most notable finding conveys that women Democrats win less often than all other candidates Democrats at the 5% significance level. This is a powerful finding, as it was determined utilizing the model with most restrictions for bias-including independent variable controls and year and district fixed effects. Therefore, this model corrected for differences that may arise between years as well as diversity in district makeup.
This finding contradicts the predominant theory in the literature—that Democratic women tend to have an easier path to election than Republican women (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). My research conveys that, in fact, Democratic women are at a disadvantage compared to other candidates in seeking election to the New York State Senate. This correlation may arise from the process of gerrymandering, in which districts are redrawn to create electorates that will support the party in power.

Republicans held the majority during the last redistricting in the New York State Senate, which occurred in 2012. New districts were constructed, with most manipulated to contain a mainly conservative voter base. This may have made it difficult for Democrats to win elections, but could have hit women Democrats even harder. This is because Republican voters tend to favor candidates that are perceived to possess “masculine” traits including strength and assertiveness and stand for issues like crime and terror (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). Women tend to be associated as being liberal, valuing policies related to education and social justice (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). In this case, voters in conservatively gerrymandered State Senate districts may fear women Democrats to be too liberal, resulting in women Democrats winning elections less often than other candidates.

This research took a number of independent variables into consideration, including incumbency status, campaign funding, and number of donors. These factors often create more obstacles for women seeking election. The incumbency advantage creates an environment in which challengers face a difficult campaign for election (Uppal, 2010). Campaign spending is also an influential component in elections, even at the New York State level, as some State Senate candidates spent over $2 million in seeking a seat. Thomsen & Swers find that securing strong donor pools is an important factor in winning an election (2017). The complexity in
potential influencing elements that can impact the results of an election creates an environment that often does not support the election of women. Women candidates must face not only the ordinary challenges of elections including facing powerful incumbents and raising substantial funds to maintain an effective campaign, but also detrimental impacts arising from gender biases. It is critical that women obtain equal representation in government, especially in the current climate, as sexual harassment has risen to the forefront as a dominating force in almost every aspect of life, and as reproductive rights are challenged and pay inequity persists. Women representatives are essential in providing a voice for those that often go unheard, and barriers must be reduced to establish a political culture that allows women to thrive and address injustices they experience.
References


