Critical Analysis of the Article on Prominent Role Models

Topic: Why do women run for office?

Article: “Prominent Role Models: High-Profile Female Politicians and the Emergence of Women as Candidates for Public Office”

- Link: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/ajps.12351

Summary

This article examines the influence of prominent female leaders on other women to pursue political candidacy and leadership roles. Authors Christina Ladam, Jeffrey J. Harden, and Jason H. Windett test their overall hypothesis that high-profile women in politics do in fact inspire other women to enter political careers and run for office. Later in the article, the authors break down their overarching hypothesis into two more specific theories to test. Their hypotheses overall argue that female political leaders in major office positions (i.e. governor or senator) serve as role models for other women with significant political interest and therefore mobilize these women to value and pursue political roles at the state legislative level. Using data specifically from American states, the authors test their theory.

The article examines the emergence of female candidates and why women do or do not choose to run for political offices. There are several reasons for the lower rates of women in politics; some factors include lower political interest, traditional familial roles, lack of prior involvement, and the feeling of a lack of qualification to run. Stereotypes also play a role in the political world, as feminine traits are not typically regarded as highly as masculine traits in the field. Women may also be inclined to avoid political involvement due to the treatment of women in politics and the potential of a negative environment. However, the interest and involvement of women in politics tends to increase when female political leaders are in their vicinity. Women in states with elected female officials tend to “have higher levels of political knowledge, interest, efficacy, and activity (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Fridkin and Kenney 2014)” (Page 371-372). Female politicians are more likely to be known and recognized than their male counterparts by women citizens, and political interest is boosted in young women when female political leaders exist. Specifically, the authors theorize that women who are already interested in politics are more likely to pursue a political career because of the influence of females in governor or senator positions.

Because most women begin their political careers at the state legislative level, the authors chose to look at the influence of women to run for office at this level. The authors specifically look at the influence of women in governor or senator roles because of how prominent and high-profile these positions are and because these positions may be seen as a major progression for women as a whole. The two courses of action for female senators or governors to take in influencing other women include symbolic motivation and true recruitment. Because the influence is likely to be on women running for office for the first time, the authors hypothesize that female governors and/or senators will influence women to run for lower chamber state legislature seats.

To conduct testing of their hypotheses, the authors used a time-series cross-sectional method that examined election data between 1978 and 2012, including State Legislative Returns from this time period. Outcome variables for both hypotheses were concluded by examining candidates that run in a general election in different years, computing variable measures within each chamber of the state legislature, and dividing the number of female election winners by number of legislature seats. The goal of this research was to determine a causal effect of women in significant political roles on other women in the public. To find this effect within their observational data, the authors utilized a weighting approach for estimation. Specifically, an approach called inverse probability of treatment weights (IPTW) was used to eliminate biases resulting from longitudinal data. A contemporaneous effect (CET) was first used to demonstrate "switching a random state's governor or senator from a man to a woman in period t, averaging over whether the state has had a female governor (senator) prior to t" (Page 374). This method was compared to the average treatment history effect (ATHE). This approach essentially compares the history of a state with a female governor or senator up to period t and another with a male governor or senator up to period t.

The results of the study showed a graph comparing the results of CET and ATHE methods. All of the CET effects were positive and demonstrated that females in major political positions cause a contemporaneous increase in the number of female candidates that run for election. However, the CETs did not show statistical significance in the difference between women that run for lower and upper chamber positions. The ATHE results were smaller than the CET but also positive, demonstrating that one additional election with a female governor or senator led to an increase in the amount of future female candidates. The results show more of an inspiration effect than a recruitment effect, though recruitment is not ruled out as a potential outcome.

The authors determine through their findings that women already interested in politics may be substantially influenced to pursue political careers and positions due to high-profile women in politics. Furthermore, they conclude that it is necessary for women to have these major role models in office to make progress and break down the gender barriers in American politics. The data demonstrates a positive effect that female role models in the political sphere have on women to pursue candidacy. This effect has the potential to lead to breakthroughs in the number of women in politics. I find that the authors' research and testing is thorough and extensive enough to reach such conclusions, and I agree that strong role models are critical to inspire women and help them see their own potential in politics. Seeing a woman in a high-profile position is motivating and shows that women are equally as qualified as men to pursue prominent leadership roles.