

Party and Political Recruitment: Women and Access to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives

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In comparison with other states, Pennsylvania has elected few women to its legislature. This research explores the role of party in determining access to the Pennsylvania House; this focus emerged after research eliminated other explanations (e.g., voter apathy, difficulty in raising money) for the paucity of women. All 37 freshman House members of the class of 1983 were interviewed to explore how they reached Harrisburg. In learning what factors accounted for their success, this study seeks to identify obstacles to the recruitment of women.

Four distinct patterns of recruitment emerged, based upon party activities and prior political office. In each of these patterns, parties have a crucial role. One factor limiting female recruitment is that their political participation has been more focused toward non-partisan activities and groups concerned with specific issues rather than with parties. Political women who devote their energies to issues instead of party reduce their likelihood of becoming state representatives.

In 1922, in the first Pennsylvania election involving women as voters and candidates, eight women won seats in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. Sixty years later, in 1982, nine women won seats in the 203-member chamber; eight were incumbents. At that time, of the 50 states only Mississippi had a smaller percentage of women in its state legislature than did Pennsylvania. Although the 1988 election raised the number of female representatives to fifteen, Pennsylvania still ranked near the bottom in the percentage of women in its legislature (National Women's Political Caucus, 1989).

No obvious explanation for Pennsylvania's ranking appears in the literature nor could any be obtained from interviews with party leaders, activists with feminist organizations, journalists, or even other political scientists. In informal interviews, observers suggested explanations such as "Pennsylvania is a conservative state" or "The Eastern European heritage hurts women." These explanations do not survive comparisons with states such as Georgia and Utah with their respective traditional and moralistic political cultures (Elazar, 1966, pp. 96-102) or, in the case of Michigan, a large ethnic population. If a general conservatism or a large Eastern European community results in a few women in the state legislature, each of these states should have a smaller percentage of women in its legislature than does Pennsylvania. On the contrary, women in these states hold a greater proportion of legislative seats than they do in Pennsylvania.

In the classic work on female representation in state legislatures, Irene Diamond notes (1977, p. 13): "The size of the legislature relative to the population — competition for seats — is the critical variable when explaining female representation in the lower houses of state legislatures: as competition for seats decreases the proportion of women legislators increases." Although there is some question of the importance of this formula in the 1980s (Nechemias, 1985), its application to Pennsylvania predicts over twice as many female legislators as are currently serving. Pennsylvania's relatively sizeable population is a predictor that few women would serve, yet the large size of the lower house is a predictor that many women would win seats. These two factors combine to bring an expectation of moderate female representation for the state, not the unusually low percentage of women in the lower house.

Earlier studies which focus specifically on political recruitment in Pennsylvania do not help us to understand why more women do not serve in the State House. Frank Sorauf (1963) looked in depth at political recruitment in the 1958 election. The question of "lady politicians" could be dealt with *quickly in that era*:

In Pennsylvania males dominate the legislature, just as they dominate all American political life. Pennsylvania Democrats appear slightly more tolerant of lady politicians than do the Republicans, but in neither party are they widely recruited for the legislative race. In many sectors of the state, social understanding of the female role hardly admits of women voting, much less of their seeking public office. The popular image of the representative is at least implicitly male. Legislative chambers in the states often bear the signs

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(for example, finely burnished cuspidors) of the male club, and a woman legislator may be viewed as an intruder into smoking-room company (p. 67).

Still, this does not explain why, by the 1980's, Pennsylvania fell behind states such as Nevada and Oklahoma in the percentage of women in the lower chamber.

Raisa Deber (1982) reported that women were not elected to Congress from Pennsylvania because they did not run frequently for that office. She found that only 88 of 2476 candidates from 1920 to 1974 were females and most of these women were sacrificial lambs in hopeless races. This work is both unsatisfying and troubling because of its blaming-the-victim quality. Becoming a viable candidate for Congress is not as easy as registering to vote. Are there obstacles that have kept women from running for office? Are these obstacles particularly strong in Pennsylvania?

The overwhelming success rate of incumbents is a powerful factor that explains why women have not rapidly raised their levels of representation (Darcy and Choike, 1986). The election of 1982, the first after redistricting, forced all candidates in Pennsylvania to run in new districts, although most new districts closely resembled old districts (O'Connor, 1983). Nevertheless, any redistricting would seemingly reduce the impact of incumbency and increase opportunities for nonincumbents, including women. This research focuses on the 1982 elections because, despite redistricting, women won only nine of 203 seats.

The focus of this paper is on the role of party in determining access to the Pennsylvania House. Earlier research (O'Connor, 1983) demonstrated that Pennsylvania voters show little inclination to vote against female candidates because of their gender, but that these women usually fight long odds as minority party candidates with severe registration disadvantages (see also Darcy et al., 1987, pp. 54-57).¹ Table 1 summarizes the first-level explanation of why more women did not win in 1982: few women ran and, when they did, they chose the wrong party. Only 31 percent of the male candidates were "hopeless," i.e., they faced a registration disadvantage of at least 15 percent.² Over half of the women were similarly disadvantaged.

Another study (O'Connor, 1984) found that female candidates did not have unusual trouble raising money. The study also showed that in Pennsylvania state house races political action committees were rarely important in either recruiting candidates or providing funds to help non-incumbents reach Harrisburg. Pennsylvania seems similar to other states in that women are not disadvantaged in raising money (Darcy et al., 1987, p. 62).

TABLE 1: "Value" of Party Nomination, by Gender, for All Candidates, 1982 General Election (N = 386)

	<u>% Male</u>	<u>(N)</u>	<u>% Female</u>	<u>(N)</u>
Easy Win (15% Registration Edge)	39	(134)	29	(11)
Competitive Hopeless (15% Registration deficit)	30	(105)	18	(7)
	31	(109)	53	(20)

tau c = 0.07; gamma = 0.29.

Source: Registration figures compiled at the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

If neither the voters, political action committees, nor money problems are responsible for the paucity of women in Harrisburg, what does account for the situation? The obvious answer is "the party." The use of "the party" as a residual explanatory category, however, is unsatisfying. There is no published evidence that party leaders in Pennsylvania are more chauvinistic than those in other states.

The intention of this paper is to look at how the 1983 freshman class reached Harrisburg in order to understand the patterns of recruitment. Interviews were conducted in 1984 with all thirty-seven freshmen — thirty-six men and one woman.³ In learning what factors account for their success we may be able to identify obstacles keeping women out of the House.

Patterns of Recruitment

A review of the backgrounds of the 37 freshmen elected in 1982 suggests four patterns of recruitment to the House. These patterns involve distinct, but not altogether different, ways the winners prepared themselves for their successful campaigns in 1982. Table 2 presents the distribution of the freshmen by party among the four types of preparation.⁴

All 37 freshmen legislators fit into one of the four recruitment patterns summarized in Table 2. Fourteen of the legislators, the "amateurs," came to Harrisburg without holding paid elected office and with only a moderate level of party activity. The polar opposite of the "amateurs" are the "politicians," freshmen for whom politics was their vocation. They both held a paid, government office and worked extensively with their party before winning their seat in the House. The two other categories, "party professionals" and "part-time politicians" represent the recruitment pattern for seven and four freshmen, respectively. The "party professionals" did not hold remunerated

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elective office before running for the legislature, but worked for their political party. The "part-time politicians" held part-time, paid local office while also holding a private-sector job. In the interviews all the freshmen explained that their relation to public office and to their party accounted for their recruitment to the legislature.

TABLE 2: Recruitment Type of Freshman Legislators by Characteristics and Party Affiliation (N=37)

Recruitment Type	Characteristic		Party Affiliation	
	Office	Party Activity	Democrat	Republican
"Amateurs"	None	Moderate	4	10
"Politicians"	Yes	Heavy	11	1
"Party Professionals"	None	Heavy	4	3
"Pt-Time Politicians"	Pt-Time	Heavy	4	0

"Amateurs" are defined by their not holding full-time political office and by the relatively moderate pace of their party activities.⁵ This group includes most of the Republican winners. In fact, the most powerful single factor separating Democratic from Republican winners is the holding of political office immediately before the campaign. Fifteen of the twenty-three Democrats held paid political office in contrast to only one of the fourteen Republicans. Among Republicans, state legislator is an entry-level office, not a step-up after service in local office. Perhaps what is happening here is that Republicans, living in areas which reflect Elazar's "moralistic political culture" (1966), are somewhat suspicious of the career political office-holder. Democrats, found both in areas of "individualistic" and "moralistic" political cultures, are more willing to send local office-holders to Harrisburg.

While "amateurs" did not prepare themselves for the state legislature by holding paid local office, six served in unpaid positions as members of township or county planning commissions. Although they had not been involved in party activities on a weekly basis, all had attended party functions and helped out during campaigns. Four even managed local campaigns for other candidates. This activity made their names known to local party elites.

Seven of the fourteen "amateurs" noted that a local party leader was the key figure in the decision to run for office. In four other cases several party activists were noted as significant in influencing the decision to run. In only one case did an "amateur" say that an interest group to which he belonged was important in his decision to run. And, in only one case did an "amateur" report that the incumbent had a significant role in the recruitment process.

This pattern of recruitment reflects the level of party organization in the districts which send "amateurs" to Harrisburg. Table 3 reports the relationship between recruitment pattern and the strength of party organization as reported by the freshmen legislators, who were asked to score the district party organization on a scale of 1 (a paper organization which does almost nothing) to 10 (an active organization which endorses candidates, registers new voters, and gets out the vote throughout the district). Weak organizations were those given a rating of 1-3, moderate ones rated 4-6, and strong ones 7-10.

TABLE 3: Recruitment Type of Freshman Legislator by Party Organizational Strength (N = 37)

Recruitment Type	Organizational Strength		
	Weak	Moderate	Strong
"Amateurs"	2	9	3
"Politicians"	1	4	7
"Party Professionals"	1	3	3
"Part-Time Politicians"	0	4	0

Unlike the "politicians," "amateurs" do not come from districts with the strongest party organizations. This may explain the success of candidates who are involved in party activities, but for whom party involvement is not a consuming passion. Where the party is not strongly organized, a moderate level of involvement may be sufficient to attain party support. Thus, seven of the fourteen "amateurs" were party endorsed and one other received an "unofficial endorsement." In none of the other races involving "amateurs" did the party endorse a primary election opponent of the eventual winner.

TABLE 4: Recruitment Type of Freshman Legislator by Incumbent Situation (N = 37)

Recruitment Type	No Incumbent		Incumbent	
	New District	Incumbent Retired	of Own Party	of Other Party
"Amateurs"	6	6	1	1
"Politicians"	0	4	5	3
"Party Professionals"	3	3	0	1
"Part-Time Politicians"	1	2	0	1

Table 4 illustrates the tendency for "amateurs" to win in districts with no incumbent, either because the incumbent was retiring or because of

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population shifts leading to the creation of an entirely new district. Of the 25 open seats, 12 were won by "amateurs." The "amateur" approach to reaching Harrisburg seems appropriate for open seats in areas without strong party organizations.

In contrast to "amateurs" are "politicians," new legislators who had supported themselves through full-time political positions as mayors, county officials, legislative assistants, or administrators. As one legislator described his occupation, "I'm a politician. Some people are bakers; others are lawyers. I'm a politician. That's what I do for a living and what I have always wanted to do." Eleven of the twelve "politicians" were Democrats. The group included the only female freshman.

A review of tables 3 and 4 demonstrates that these "politicians" represent districts with moderate to strong party organizations and that eight of the twelve winners defeated incumbents. It should not be surprising, then, to note that all of the "politicians" reported extensive party involvement, especially around elections. These were candidates for whom politics played the major role in their careers for years. Six of the twelve, including the only female freshman and one son who replaced his deceased father in the House, had relatives with extensive political involvements. None of the "amateurs" reported a single relative who had been involved in politics. Whereas the "amateurs" had made themselves available for the legislative race, the "politicians" more actively sought the office. Several of the "amateurs" spoke of being prepared in case "some opportunity came along." The "politicians" spoke of their long-term work designed to ensure that they would become state representatives.

The difference between "amateurs" and "politicians" is the difference between individuals contemplating a change of career and individuals seeking advancement in the same career. For the "amateurs," until they became legislators, politics constituted an activity tangential to their primary work. This is not to say that several "amateurs" did not devote great attention to their political avocation or that for some the avocation had professional payoffs, but it still was an avocation. For the "politicians," politics was and is their vocation, so they paid close attention to party activities.

The "politicians," with two exceptions, did not speak of others asking them to run, but of their own efforts to gather support. One of the two exceptions involves a district with a strong party organization in which the incumbent "recruited and anointed" one of his long-term supporters. The other is the case of the young son, 22 at the time of his election, who was asked by party leaders to run for his late father's seat.

If an aspirant to the legislature is in an area with a strong party organization, success more likely comes through extensive involvement with

the party and through local office, at least if the area is Democratic in character (see also McDonald and Pierson, 1984). The aspirant, however, should not become too sanguine about his or her chances. Eight of our "politicians" defeated incumbents, but many other "politicians" challenged incumbents that year only to lose.⁶

A third type of freshman is the "party professional." This type comprises seven new members who resemble "amateurs" in that they do not have political employment, but resemble "professionals" in their attention to party matters.⁷ Two of these men are ex-legislators, two ex-legislative assistants, and one worked as an advance man for a gubernatorial candidate. All held party office at the time of the 1982 elections. With these candidates there is not a question of party elites recruiting candidates, but the party elites themselves running for office. Actually, in the case of the ex-legislators and assistants, we have "professionals" returning home, becoming quite active in party matters, and using this activity to present themselves as likely party candidates. In the case of the other three "party professionals," they used their extensive party involvement in districts with strong party organizations to garner party support for their nominations. In the case of each of the two Republicans who represent one-party districts, their nomination came as a reward for years of party work on behalf of Republican organizations and other candidates.

The fourth type of freshman is the "part-time politician." This group comprises four Democrats who had part-time, remunerated local political offices while also holding down jobs in the private sector. In their 40's or older, these men had been quite active in party affairs for many years, including managing the campaigns of other candidates. Found in areas of moderate party strength, these freshmen enjoyed party support in their primary campaigns. Also, like "amateurs" and "professionals," they tended to win in districts where no incumbent was running.

Conclusions and Discussion

In the three elections since 1982, women have increased their representation in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from nine to fifteen. Before proponents of a greater number of women legislators can rejoice at this trend, however, they should know that most of this increase can be explained by wives replacing their husbands who died in office. This hardly suggests a strategy for eventual gender equality of representation in the legislature. This section suggests the implications of the research for electing more women and proposes a direction for future research.

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One conclusion relates to Pennsylvania's textbook status as a competitive, two-party state (e.g., Jewell and Olson, 1988). The state may be competitive in terms of party balance in the state legislature or in terms of the distribution of winners of statewide offices in recent years. This does not mean that most legislative races are competitive. Opportunities to become a state representative through challenging an incumbent are quite limited. With low turnover, realistic opportunities for non-incumbents to become legislators are few in number. Their best route seems to be to run in a district with no incumbent candidate on the ballot: 25 of the 37 members in the Pennsylvania House's freshman class of 1983 followed this route.

A second conclusion supports Schlesinger's argument (1966) that there are specific patterns of requisites for different offices in different places. In areas of weak party organization, party activity — but not local political office — is a requisite for office. In areas of strong Democratic party organization, the holding of local political office facilitates reaching the legislature. None of the legislators said that school board membership (the local office held by most female office holders in Pennsylvania in the 1980s) is helpful in reaching Harrisburg.

A third conclusion suggests a caveat to those who have proclaimed the death of parties (see, for example, Fishel, 1978). Party may be less powerful as a cue to voters than it has been, but, at least in Pennsylvania, the recruitment process is dominated by political parties. Political Action Committees are not significantly involved in recruitment. Incumbents had an important role in selecting their successors in only two or three cases. Instead, we see individuals working to attain the support of party activists.

The critical role of party involvement in recruitment for the Pennsylvania house works against women becoming candidates for two reasons. First, political women have been less likely to focus their activities on political parties than have political men (Carroll, 1985; Kirkpatrick, 1974). Women are more likely to devote their energies to traditional non-partisan, good-government groups (e.g., League of Women Voters) and to organizations concerned with specific policy agendas (e.g., National Organization for Women, right to life groups). None of the candidates in our sample participated in these kinds of activities to the total exclusion of party activities. Whereas many candidates reported some participation in civic groups, involvement in issue groups was almost non-existent for all but two or three of the successful candidates. Political women who devote their energies to issues instead of party reduce their likelihood of becoming state representatives.

When women do volunteer for party activities, they may find that advancement beyond clerical tasks comes more easily for men. One female party activist noted:

... (a female volunteer) has been working on elections for ten years and always does a great job. Her district is a mess; they've had three different guys running it in five years. Still (the county chair) isn't going to appoint her district coordinator. He just doesn't see women in that kind of role – although they do 90 percent of the envelope stuffing in ... county. Too, he never gets women appointed to county boards and commissions. I don't think he's ever thought about what he's doing....

To the extent that women have been disadvantaged in rising in party hierarchy, they have been disadvantaged in getting party endorsements for office.

For feminists concerned with the paucity of women in the state house, the message could be worse. The problem is not with the voters nor with the contributors. The key is participation in party affairs, and there is no obvious reason political women cannot devote more of their energies to party involvement. An increase in female involvement in party activities would produce more viable candidates immediately and, in the longer term, develop more candidates through reducing subtle and not-so-subtle discrimination by party leaders. The route to the state capital, at least in Pennsylvania, is still the local political party. While it works differently in different districts, it is available everywhere to women who seek to use it.

Winning office involves more than becoming part of the eligible pool; women in the eligible pool must then choose to become candidates. Future research might well look into why many women who are part of this eligible pool choose not to become candidates. The research reported here traced how the freshman class of 1983 reached Harrisburg. In one open-seat race, for example, the eventual winner defeated four other males in the Republican primary. There were several Republican women in his district whose record of both professional accomplishments and participation in party affairs placed them in the eligible pool. Yet none of these women ran. A next step of research in political recruitment in Pennsylvania is to find out why some potential candidates choose to run while others do not.⁸

NOTES

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1. In contested races for open seats, the simple r between the winner's vote percentage and gender, expressed as a dummy variable is -0.31 with the traditional coding of 1 = male and 2 = female. But, when the winner's party's registration percentage is introduced as a control variable, the new correlation coefficient is 0.04 . The correlation coefficient between the winner's vote percentage and the winner's party's registration is 0.88 . In other words, males seem to do better as candidates, but this advantage disappears when party registration is taken into account. Males seem to do better because they are more likely to run as the candidate of the majority party.
2. A small number of these "hopeless" candidates (two) did indeed overcome the registration disadvantage to win. In the absence of special circumstances, however, the labelling of these races seems justified.
3. Educationally, 5 of the freshmen hold law degrees, 11 of the 37 are not college graduates, and, of the 26 college graduates, 6 hold master's degrees. This educational profile is sufficiently broad that many women remain in the "eligible pool" (Welch, 1978; Darcy et al., 1987, ch. 5) from which candidates emerge.
The one female freshman was Ruth Rudy, the Democratic prothonotary of Centre County. She defeated Republican Gregg Cunningham, a leader of anti-abortion efforts in the House, in a race with unusually high expenditures as both the pro-choice Rudy and the pro-life Cunningham raised over \$ 50,000 including contributions from outside the state (O'Connor, 1984). Although Cunningham was a member of the House, he was technically not an incumbent candidate in the race because he had moved before the election into the new, rural, heavily Republican neighboring district. Although the abortion issue brought funds and attention to the race, during the campaign Cunningham stressed his experience and party affiliation. Rudy stressed her lifelong residency in the district and portrayed Cunningham as an urban carpetbagger. She won with over 55 percent and was reelected through the 1980s.
4. Because the data reported in this and subsequent tables comprise the entire population, tests for statistical significance are unnecessary.

5. These "amateurs" should not be confused with the "reluctant solons" and "retirees" portrayed in Barber's *Lawmakers* (1965) and other studies of state legislatures prior to the reapportionment decisions of the 1960's. Only one of the "amateurs" is even in his 50's and the eleven college graduates in this category include three attorneys. All reported working hard at campaigning, and a majority volunteered that they worked door-to-door to meet constituents.
6. One's chances are far better in open-seat elections; but, even after a redistricting, 88 percent of House members sought reelection. Although one can engage in behavior that will help one's chances, winners still need patience and luck.
7. They also resemble "amateurs" in their tendency to win in districts with no incumbent candidates.
8. In an analysis of city council members, Blensoe and Herring (1990) found that women generally lack the single mindedness and driving ambition necessary to advance beyond local office. "The current system of obtaining political office ... is highly individualized and competitive, emphasizing characteristics that are fundamentally inconsistent with women's status and role orientations." (p. 221)

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