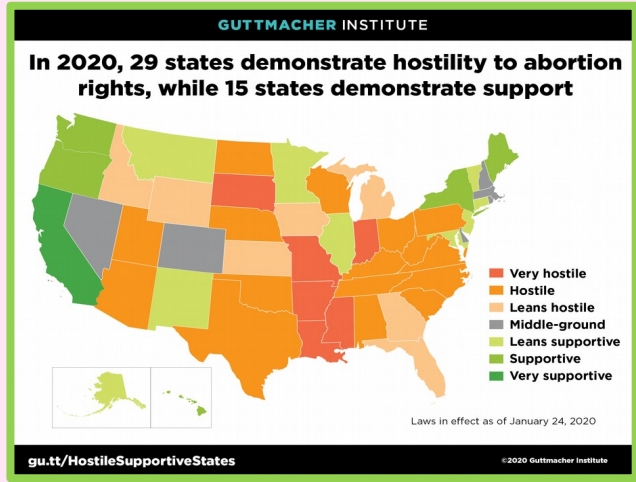
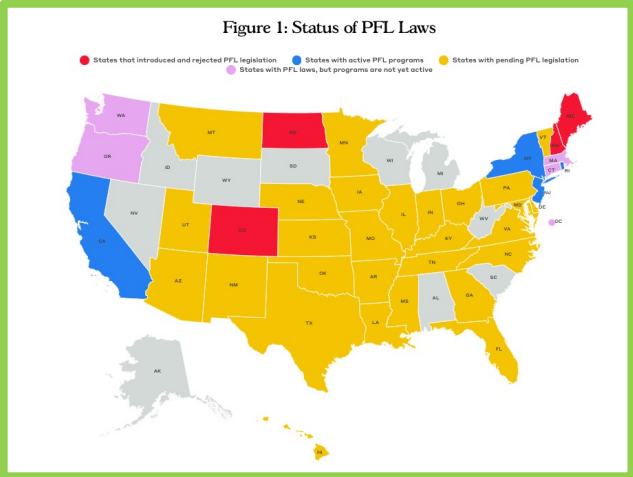


Representing Women of Today: Does Gender Still Matter? A Study on the Benefit of Descriptive Representation

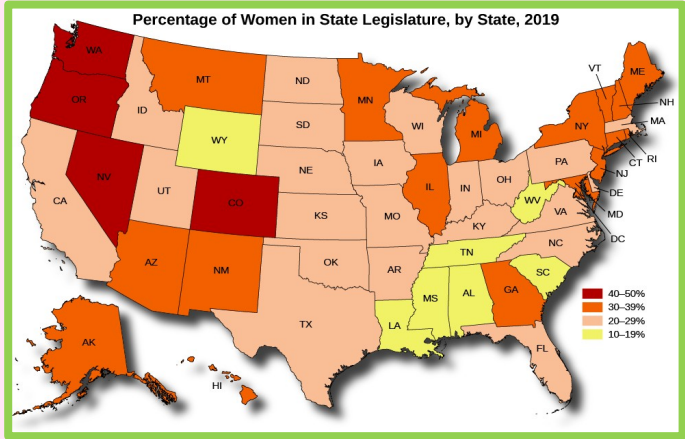
By Ela Marvin



One way to build support for female political candidates is to find reasons why they are distinct from their male counterparts in regard to representation. This paper intends to do that, by looking at the benefits of descriptive representation. Specifically, I will look to see if states with higher amounts of women in their state legislator create policy more representative of women. By showing that female legislators support women in their continuances better than men, we can start to make a claim that having female legislators improves the quality of representation for more Americans.



The Guttmacher institute ranks 29 states as having abortion laws that are either “lean hostile”, “hostile” or “very hostile”, and 15 states as having abortion laws that are either “lean supportive”, “supportive” or “very supportive”. The other 6 states were ranked as “middle ground”. For the 29 states ranked on the “hostile” side, the combined average of women within their legislators is 22.4%. For the middle ground states, the average is surprisingly high, with 37.1%. For states ranked on the “supportive” side, the average is 34.6%. To compare, in 2019, 28.9% was the average percentage of women within state legislators nationwide.



Out of the four states that have active paid family leave programs only one ranks in the top ten states with highest percentage of women in their legislator. However, all four states, as well as the four states that have passed laws for paid family leave but don’t have active programs yet, all have legislators with a democratic majority. This suggests a better predictor of whether a state supports paid family leave is whether it is red or blue. This is supported further by the fact that all the states that have introduced and rejected paid family leave bills in the past have either a split or republican leaning legislator.

My results suggest that there is indeed a correlation between the number of women within a state legislator and the amount of policy produced in a state supporting women’s issues. My paper serves as a very limited sample and leaves out many various components that need to be studied before any sort of definitive claim can be made. In addition, further research on the impact of partisanship on gender should be conducted in order to see how the interaction of multiple identities impacts decision making. However, the fact that my results are similar to previous studies is a good sign that future studies would further confirm my findings.