A View from the Top: Gender Differences in Legislative Priorities Among State Legislative Leaders

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Abstract:

Women are no longer token participants in the governing process in U.S. state legislatures. Rather, they comprise more than one fifth of the state legislative membership and have become a visible force in leadership, holding about fifteen percent of all leadership positions. Unfortunately, there has been no systematic effort to examine the differences between the issue priorities of men and women leaders. Given the growing number of women in leadership and the importance of leaders as agenda setters, this question warrants attention. Our results indicate that while women are a growing part of modern legislative leadership teams, they are less prominent in key leadership positions. Women leaders in our sample do have legislative agendas distinct from their male counterparts. Specifically, women leaders are more likely to report issues of traditional concern to women: health care, social services, women's family and children's issues, and the environment as priorities. They are less likely than are men to emphasize taxes, budget matters, public safety, institutional regulation and matters of insurance or product liability as legislative priorities. Further, we find that differences between women and men leaders remain significant when controls for party, race, experience, type of leadership position and region are included in the model. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> ©2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Article:

Women now make up more than one fifth (22.5%) of state legislative membership nationwide, and more than thirty percent in seven states (Center for the American Woman and Politics 2000). As one would expect, the increased representation of women in state legislatures has led academicians to examine both the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. Scholars have found that women and men are different in how they arrive at a legislative position (Consadine and Deutchman 1994; Dodson and Carroll 199), how they campaign for their legislative office, how they lead (Jewell and Whicker 1994), the issues they support (Hansen 1993; Mezey 1994; Sykora, Edwards, and Bodie 1994; Thomas 1994), how they interact with their constituents (Richardson and Freeman 1995; Sussman and West 1995) and how they work within the legislative institution (Kathlene 1989; 1995). While it is quite evident that women and men legislators behave differently, there has been little examination of the differences between

them once they enter the ranks of institutional leadership. Do the differences remain or are they muted by the substantial political and institutional responsibilities associated with leadership status? This is the question we address below using data gathered from 236 state legislative leaders.

It is important to study the differences between men and women leaders for several reasons. First, the number of women legislative leaders has increased. Although their numbers in leadership have not reached their membership mark of over twenty percent, women leaders have made significant gains in the last twenty years (Jewell and Whicker 1993). Given the disproportionate effect that legislative leaders have on policy (Rosenthal 1998), it is imperative that we understand the nature and significance of women in this role. Second, recent efforts to devolve power from the national government have significantly increased the power and responsibility of the state governments in general and the state legislatures in particular (Van Horn 1996). The growing power of state legislatures necessitates a better understanding of those exercising that power. Finally, term limit statutes enacted in several states across the country greatly increase the power of legislative leaders to set and carry out the legislative agenda. With the radical decrease of experienced members and large freshmen classes (sometimes exceeding 40 percent of the membership) associated with term limited institutions, leaders become a critical source of information (both policy and political) and socialization for those who sorely need both (Little and Peery 2000; Penning 2000). As seniority is defined in terms of years rather than decades and legislative experience is termed out of existence, formal positions of leadership become even more critical bases of power (Gunvitt 1996). Given these recent trends, a thorough appreciation for the gendered nature of legislative leadership agendas is essential to a full understanding of the legislative process.

In the pages that follow, we examine the priorities of state legislative leaders to determine the degree to which those priorities differ between men and women leaders. The proportion of men and women leaders citing particular issues is noted and the balance of legislative priorities cited by each leader is regressed on gender while controlling for a variety of political, personal, institutional, and state characteristics to determine if gender differences are significant. Prior research strongly suggests that the priorities of men and women legislators are different. The purpose of this paper is to determine if these differences withstand the pressures associated with leadership.

Leaders as agenda setters

The leader of the modern state legislature wears many hats. She is a mediator, a fundraiser, an engineer (of the legislative process), a mentor, and a communicator. He is a coalition builder, a negotiator, a role model, and a leader of the party. Many of these seemingly diverse roles can be summed up in that of agenda setter, perhaps the oldest and still most significant responsibility of the legislative leader. It is understood that virtually no significant legislation will survive the legislative process without the support (or at least absent vocal opposition of) legislative leadership (Jewell and Whicker 1994; Rosenthal 1981). Leaders have a disproportionate impact on the issues to be addressed, as well as passed, by the legislative institution.

This power emanates from several formal and informal powers usually ascribed to institutional or partisan leaders of the state legislature. First, leaders manage the agenda by manipulating the process of bill assignment. In all but a handful of states, presiding officers have

complete discretion as to the committee assignment of a piece of legislation. A bill that the speaker opposes will likely end up in an unfriendly committee and never be a serious part of the legislative agenda. Second, party leaders in most states determine the make-up and leadership of committees such that they have substantial power over the disposition of bills from each committee (Jewell and Whicker 1994, 92-96). Third, presiding officers or floor leaders manage the legislative agenda by controlling the floor calendar personally or through a "gatekeeper" committee that they have appointed (Rosenthal 1989). Finally, presiding officers exercise considerable control over the agenda through their formal powers of recognition and floor debate.

Less formal leadership responsibilities also contribute to the ability of a leader to manage and manipulate the legislative agenda. In recent years, leaders have taken on an increasingly visible role as spokesperson of the legislative institution (chamber leaders) or the legislative caucus (party leaders). In this role, they contribute significantly to the public agenda for that constituency. In fact, legislative leaders in several states (for example, Alaska, Illinois, Indiana, Delaware, Ohio) publish an agenda prior to the session establishing exactly what they and their party or institution intend to accomplish during the pending legislative session. Further, modern state legislative leaders have taken on an increasingly partisan role in coordinating the campaign efforts of their caucus members (Little 1995). A growing number of leaders develop and promote legislative agendas prior to the election that will be useful in their candidate's campaign. These issues then become the base of the legislative agenda in the new legislative session (Sutton 1996; Weilhower 1996). In short, institutional or partisan leaders, whether they are women or men, have the potential to significantly influence and even alter the issue agenda of the legislature.

Climbing the ladder: women in legislative leadership

As noted above, women have made tremendous strides over the last twenty years in terms of membership in the state legislature. In 1969, only four percent (301) of all state legislators were women. By 1997, that proportion had increased by more than five hundred percent to over twenty-one percent (21.5%) or 1,593 members. Following the 2000 elections, there were 1,670 female state legislators (22.5%). Although the proportion of women leaders has not kept pace with the membership gains, it has increased significantly in recent years. In 1983, there were only nine women in leadership posts1 in the state legislature. By 2000, that number had grown to 36, or just under eleven percent of all leaders. About fifteen percent (14.6%) of all lower chamber leaders were female, while just over one out of ten (10.3%) upper chamber leaders were women. Interestingly, women comprised a larger proportion of the Republican leadership (13.7%) than Democratic (10.3%).

As indicated in Table 1, there are presently seven women presiding officers in state capitols, with four speakers (AK, ME, NH, and OH) and three senate presidents (AZ, FL, and IA). Further, women are filling the roles of Pro Tempore (13.5%), Minority Leader (9.9%), and Majority Leader (11.5%). While their numbers and importance are increasing, it should also be noted that they do fill a lower proportion (7.1%) of those positions deemed as key (with responsibility for appointing committee chairs and members). However, these seven leaders represent the largest number of key leader positions that women have ever held in the state legislatures.

The gender gap in political attitudes and behavior

The question of whether women and men hold different political views has been of longstanding interest. Gender differences in patterns of socialization and life experience led many scholars and activists to expect a gender gap in political attitudes. The anticipated "woman's point of view" was largely an extrapolation from women's private, domestic sphere roles and responsibilities to political interests (Ruddick 1980; Sapiro 1983; Thomas 1994). With respect to mass political behavior (voting), concern about the existence of gender differences resulted in the anticipation of the emergence of a woman's voting block after women gained suffrage. Suffragists were quickly dispelled of this notion and quite disappointed, as women's early voting behavior failed to reflect a "woman's point of view" (Sapiro 1983).

TABLE 1. Gender Distribution of 1997 State Legislative Party Leaders by Position

	*Senate President		House Speaker		**Pro Tempore		Majority Leader		Minority Leader		***Key Leader	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Males	27	90.0	45	91.8	64	86.5	77	88.5	82	90.1	76	93.8
Females	3	10.0	4	8.2	10	13.5	10	11.5	8	9.9	5	6.2
Total	30	9.3	49	14.8	74	22.3	87	26.2	90	27.1	81	100.0

*Senate Presidents include the Speaker of the unicameral Nebraska Assembly and only Lt. Governors with substantial legislative responsibilities.
**Pro Tempores includes the Chairperson of the Executive Board of the Legislative Council of the unicameral Nebraska Assembly.
***The key leader in an institution was defined as the leader responsible to appoint committee members according to Erickson, 1998. In 17 chambers, assignments are made by committee or must have approval of the caucus or chamber membership.

Decades later, differences in women's and men's political attitudes slowly began to be manifest in voting patterns, with women indicating less support than men for the use of force and violence and more support than men for "compassion" issues, policies which aid the poor, the unemployed, the sick, and others in need (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986). These differences in patterns of policy preferences among voters have persisted, with the 1980s beginning a period of more marked divergence between the sexes that has continued, to varying degrees, up to the present (Wirls 1986). Public opinion polls from the 1990s show that relative to men, women are less militaristic, less supportive of the death penalty, and more likely to favor gun control, environmental protection measures, efforts to achieve racial equality, programs to help the economically disadvantaged, and laws to regulate and control drugs, gambling, and pornography (Cook and Wilcox 1991; Dodson and Carroll 1991; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997).

Over the last twenty-five years, social scientists have turned their attention to women officeholders in order to examine whether mass-level gender differences in political attitudes and behavior are also evident in the policy priorities of those in public office. Early studies of women state legislators conducted in the 1970s revealed that men and women legislators held different political opinions, but that these differences rarely translated into differences in behavior (e.g., voting patterns or policy priorities) (Diamond 1977; Johnson and Carroll 1978; Mezey 1978a, 1978b; Thomas 1991, 1994). As the number of women in state legislatures increased, distinctive behavioral patterns became more apparent (Flammang 1985; Thomas 1994). Today, growing evidence suggests that women state legislators are promoting policies different from those emphasized by men, especially in areas traditionally considered of interest to women. Traditional interests for women are associated with the domestic concerns of women and women's civic worker function (Diamond 1977; Saint-Germain 1989). Examples of this agenda include policies

addressing women's rights; the needs of women, children and families; the provision of social services, including health care and education; and protection of the environment (Carroll, Dodson, and Mandell 1991; Dahlkemper 1996; Kathlene, Clarke, and Fox 1991; Reingold 1992; Saint-Germaine 1989; Thomas 1991,1994, and 1997; Welch and Thomas 1991). In addition to these gender differences in policy preferences, Cindy Simon Rosenthal's study (1998) of committee chairs finds that women committee chairs are more likely to adopt an integrative, rather than competitive, leadership style. She finds that this different perspective on leadership leads to gender differences in attitude toward leadership, leadership traits, and leadership behavior.

Factors affecting the development of distinctive policy priorities among women legislatures

A number of factors have been posited to impact the extent to which women's political attitudes will be manifest in distinctive legislative priorities. Both situational/structural constraints and individual characteristics have been shown to influence women's political priorities and behavior (Dodson and Carroll 1991). Pressures to represent constituents are one factor that can affect women's policy priorities (Reingold 1992). The fact that women, in the aggregate, are elected from more liberal constituencies may cause them to be more supportive than men of liberal programs such as those providing aid to the disadvantaged (Welch 1985). We expect that these pressures for representation, to the extent that they exist for women legislators, will also affect women in leadership roles. However, women leaders must answer to a broader constituency than their electoral district: their caucus or institutional membership. Therefore, we might assume, given the logic implied by Welch (1985) in her study of roll call votes, women leaders who represent a caucus or institution with a higher proportion of women will be more likely to adopt a female friendly agenda.

Gender differences in legislative committee assignments can also shape the policy priorities of state legislators and influence the extent to which a distinct woman's agenda is evident. Surveys show that women are more likely than men to serve on and chair committees dealing with traditional women's interests (e.g., education, health, welfare) and less likely to serve on and chair committees dealing with business and fiscal affairs (Darcy 1996; Diamond 1977; Thomas and Welch 1991; Thomas 1994). This patterning has been attributed to both women and men legislators' preferences and to institutional norms that reserve the most important committees for men (Darcy 1996; Thomas and Welch 1991). While women's preference for certain committee assignments is in itself an indication of priority differences, subsequent participation on committees can also create (or reinforce) gendered priorities. We expect that by virtue of having achieved leadership roles, the women legislators examined in our study will be more likely than the average woman legislator to be active on committees judged important. Further, in some institutions, leadership positions include the requirement that the leader sit on particular committees. Because fiscal and rules committees are often considered to be among the most important (Darcy 1996), women legislative leaders' committee participation may cause them to select priorities that are less likely than those of rank-and-file women legislators to reflect the traditional interests of women.

It has also been suggested that the low representation of women in public office may cause them to feel insecure and thus constrain their willingness to express minority views. Thomas (1994) argues that while women and men legislators have always had different opinions on political issues, lack of acceptance of women in public roles in the past served to limit their

willingness to risk their positions by emphasizing issues that were not supported by their male colleagues. The following comment expressed by a Southern woman legislator in Thomas' (1997) interview study provides an example: "If women legislators talk only about abortion, the ERA, alimony, always the women's angle, then men stop listening" (p. 35). Thomas's research suggests that as women's representation has moved beyond token levels and they have gained the respect of both the public and their male counterparts, visible gender differences in policy priorities emerge.

Welch (1985) observes the opposite pattern in her study of voting patterns in the U.S. Congress. She argues that when women's representation in Congress is extremely low, their marginal status makes them less careerist and thus more willing to express unpopular views. The limited likelihood of achieving higher office is seen as tempering political aspirations and liberating congresswomen to express unorthodox political priorities. Welch finds that as women's numbers in Congress increase, the gender gap in voting decreases. She attributes this change to increasing careerism on the part of women, and associated pressures for conformity.

The question of how women legislative leaders' policy priorities are affected by their overall numbers is an interesting one that has not been addressed in prior research. Following Thomas (1994), one might hypothesize that women legislative leaders, bolstered by the increasing numbers of women in the legislature, would voice policy priorities aligned with women's issues and interests. A competing hypothesis can be derived from the research of Welch (1985). If we assume that women legislative leaders are more careerist than other women in the legislature, Welch's argument would suggest that the career aspirations of women in leadership roles will make them less likely to express policy priorities that are outside the "mainstream." In other words, their desire to hold higher level offices will cause their political behavior to be more like that of men as they are forced to "play the game" in order to move up to higher level office. Similarly, one might hypothesize that the women who have achieved leadership roles in male-dominated state legislatures are those who have priorities similar to those of their male counterparts (Norris 1986; Randall 1982).

Various individual characteristics have been suggested to affect the gender gap in political attitudes and behavior. While women legislators themselves often indicate that their distinctive occupational experiences as nurses, teachers and social workers give them different perspectives than their male counterparts, research shows that occupational background has little effect on women legislator's policy priorities (Dodson and Carroll 1991). Age and seniority have also been posited to affect policy attitudes and priorities, but research indicates that their effects are rather limited and conditional (Dodson and Carroll 1991). While men and women legislators exhibit considerable agenda difference, the pressures of leadership may tend to mute those differences for men and women in leadership roles.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper is to determine whether the differences in policy positions that has been established regarding women as voters and rank-and-file legislators also exists when they move into positions of leadership with all of the challenges and pressures those positions entail. We will examine the issue agendas of male and female leaders in the context of other factors traditionally associated with progressive, liberal, or female friendly agendas. Although the pressures on women leaders to represent their entire caucus or institution is great, it is our contention, given the differences between genders established in the electorate and among rank-and-file members, that women leaders will have a significantly different agenda than their male counterparts.

We have a series of expectations. Women will hold policy preferences that reflect their experiences in the private sphere (Carroll, Dodson and Mandell 1991; Dahlkemper 1996; Diamond 1977; Kathlene, Clarke and Fox 1991; Reingold 1992; Rosenthal1998; Saint-Germaine 1989; Thomas 1991, 1994, and 1997; Welch and Thomas 1991). Women who come from legislatures where there is a critical mass of women might be more likely to pursue agendas that reflect women's interests (Thomas 1994). Similarly, women who come from party caucuses that have a critical mass of women might be more likely to adopt female friendly agendas. On the other hand, women who are one of only a handful of women might be less likely to be careerists and thus less inhibited in pursuing a women's agenda (Welch 1985). Women's gendered experiences in committee assignments (being more likely to be assigned to committees that deal with traditional women's interests and are less prestigious) may extend to women legislative leaders pursuing a women's interest agenda. However, legislative leaders are frequently required to sit on important fiscal and rules committees where it is more difficult to pursue a female friendly agenda. Thus, women legislative leaders may have had to focus their legislative agenda away from women's interests (Darcy 1996). Women's individual characteristics of education, occupation, age, and seniority also might have an impact on their policy agendas (Dodson and Carroll 1991)

Data and methods

In order to examine women' s representation in state legislative leadership and the legislative agendas of party leaders, we used data from The Handbook of State Legislative Leaders: 1997-1998 (State Legislative Leaders Forum).[2] Leaders are defined as persons holding the following positions in Spring 1997: Presidents, Pro Tempores, Majority Leaders, and Minority Leaders in the Senate, and Speakers, Pro Tempores, Majority Leaders, and Minority Leaders in the House.[3] The Speaker of the Legislature and the Chairperson of the Executive Board of Legislative Council were included as leaders in the unicameral Nebraska Assembly. By this definition, the pool of legislative leaders includes 331 legislator.[4]

Measuring legislative priorities

In preparing The Handbook of State Legislative Leaders: 1997-1998 (State Legislative Leaders Forum), the staff of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation distributed a survey to the 33 1 leaders holding the positions noted above. Among the questions they asked was a question regarding the leader's main legislative priorities for 1997. We used the responses to this question, coded as traditional male or traditional female issue as described below.[5] Of the 331 leaders identified in The Handbook of State Legislative Leaders: 1997-1 998 (State Legislative Leaders Forum), 236 (70.8%) responded to the question. The sample appears to be a remarkably accurate reflection of the population of legislative leaders in 1997 (see Appendix), with no significant differences in regard to party, ethnicity, gender, position, or chamber. The legislative priorities of each leader were coded into issue categories (indicated in Table 2) reflecting traditional male and female interests and agendas, as determined from previous studies of rank and file legislators. Traditional female issues included education; health care; social services; women, family and children, the environment; and local or district issues. Traditional male issues revolved around financial matters, and included economic development, taxes, budget matters, as well as issues of public safety,[6] matters of organization and regulation of governing institutions,

and concerns regarding insurance and insurance liability (tort reform and worker's compensation). Several issues, including agriculture, campaign regulation, regulation of public utilities, and issues concerning the management of labor unions, were coded as gender neutral because prior research has not established a clear patterning by gender. A glance at the data reveals that just over half of the issues cited by the legislative leaders fall into the "traditional male'' category (54.09%), just under forty percent in the "traditional female" category (39.16%), and just under seven percent (6.7%) were assigned to the gender neutral category.

Examining priority differences

Analysis of the data is conducted in two stages. First, the proportion of men and women leaders citing each of the agenda items discussed above is presented in Table 2. Second, the percentage of female oriented issues cited by respondents is regressed on gender and several control variables (using Ordinary Least Squares regression) to determine if the gender is a significant predictor of issue agendas in the context of other variables traditionally associated with policy positions. This proportional measure of a female oriented agenda is identical to that used by Thomas (1994) and Dolan and Ford (1995) to establish the legislative priorities of female state legislators, and by Barrett (1995) to determine the priorities of black female state legislators. As in each of these studies, the legislators were given an open-ended question and could note as many issues as they wish. As noted above, the responses were then coded as male, female, or neutral orientation based on previous studies.[7]

Ethnicity,[8] political party, and legislative institution are included because ethnic minorities (Carroll, Dodson and Mandel 1991, 17), Democrats (Carroll 1989; Dolan and Ford 1995), and members of lower chambers[9] traditionally possess agendas more similar to the socially progressive female agenda described above. Years in the leadership position[10] and importance of the position[11] are also included on the assumption that senior leaders and those in the most significant positions will be more likely to adopt the more traditional male positions.[12] Prior research has established that rank-and-file members with the greatest tenure are least likely to support female friendly agendas (Dolan and Ford 1995). Just as the proportion of women legislators in each party influences the degree to which rank-and-file members are willing to reflect a distinct agenda (Thomas 1994,98-102), higher representation by women is likely to give both men and women leaders incentive to express a more female agenda. The degree of legislative professionalism measured by the scores assigned by Peverill Squire (1992) is considered because more professional legislatures tend to support more progressive policies as their members seek to keep their positions (Ehrenhalt 1991; A. Rosenthal 1998). Finally, region is included as a control because the South has been shown to have more traditional attitudes and tends to marginalize the attitudes and role of women.13 Therefore, we expect southern leaders to be less supportive of women's issues. Tests for multicollinearity reveal no pairs of independent variables correlated at more than .3. Data sources for the variables used in this model include The Handbook of State Legislative Leaders: 1997-1998 (State Legislative Leaders Forum) and various publications of the Center for the American Woman and Politics (CAWP).

Findings

Do women leaders support different agendas?

The issues cited by individual leaders as their priorities for 1997 are listed in Table 2. As noted above, the issues are defined as traditionally male, traditionally female, and gender neutral, reflecting issues designated as gender relevant in previous research, particularly Saint-Germain (1989), Carroll, Dodson, and Mandell (1991), Thomas (1994), Sykora, Edwards, and Bodie (1994), and Barrett (1995). In support of the findings of Carroll, Dodson, and Mandel (1991) and Jewel1 and Whicker (1994), the distribution of stated priorities by sex in Table 2 suggests that women leaders maintain an agenda distinct from that of their male counterparts. Women are more likely than men to have as a stated priority five of the six items defined as traditional female issues, although the difference is statistically significant only in the case of health care and social services. They are less likely to cite education as a legislative priority, but the difference does not approach the traditional measures of statistical significance.

TABLE 2. Leadership Agendas of Male and Female Leaders

	% of Males	% of Females	Difference Pred. Direction (sig.)
Traditional Female Issues			
Education	48.8	50.0	No
Health Care	19.9	35.7	Yes**
Social Services	16.7	28.6	Yes*
Environment	9.1	14.3	Yes
Women/Fam./Children	7.1	10.7	Yes
Local/District Issues	3.5	3.6	Yes
Traditional Male Issues			
Econ. Development	34.6	28.6	Yes
Taxes	33.5	28.6	Yes
Budget	26.8	10.7	Yes*
Crime & Punishmemt	20.6	7.1	Yes*
Government Institutions	13.9	3.6	Yes
Insurance/Liability	5.3	0.0	Yes
Gender Neutral Issues			
Campaign Regulations	9.1	3.6	NA
Agriculture	1.9	0.0	NA
Utility Regulation	1.9	3.3	NA
Labor/Union Matters	1.9	3.6	NA
Number of Respondents	205	30	

*One-tailed Sig. at .05   **One-tailed Sig. at .025   ***One-tailed Sig. at .01

Men in leadership positions were more likely than women to cite issues traditionally found to be more significant to males. This pattern held for each of the six traditional male items, but again the gender differences were statistically significant for only two of the stated priorities, budget matters and public safety. No statistically significant differences were found between the proportion of men and women citing issues coded as gender neutral. All four of these issues

combined comprise less than five percent of the total issues mentioned. The data in Table 2 clearly suggest that men and women leaders bring to their leadership position distinct agendas. However, the bivariate relationships presented in Table 2 could be masking another relationship that is in fact the source of these differences. For example, given that women are more likely to be leaders of lower chambers and lower chamber members tend to be more responsive to constituents, it is possible that the gender differences evident in Table 2 are a function of institutional differences. In order to test for such relationships, the effects of gender on issue agendas is considered in conjunction with a variety of control variables in an OLS multiple regression. The results of that model are presented in Table 3.

Are women leaders really different?

TABLE 3. The Effect of Gender on the Proportion of Traditional Women's Issues Among the Priorities of State Legislative Leaders

Independent Variables	B	Beta	S.E. of B
Personal Characteristics of Leader			
Female Leader	25.8367	.2303	7.2792***
Nonwhite Leader	13.7309	.1071	8.3455
Political Characteristics of Leader			
Democratic Leader	.2208	.0031	4.7294
Years in Position	.8268	.1086	.5045*
Nature of the Leadership Position			
Key Leadership Position	−8.9582	−.1066	5.5065*
Lower Chamber Position	2.3719	.0329	4.6231
Nature of the Membership and Institution			
% Women in Caucus	32.6401	.1063	21.2492
Southern State	13.5177	.1434	6.4029**
Institutional Professionalism	34.2933	.1429	15.6447**

R-Squared	.12
Sig. of F	.0006
Number of Cases	235

*Sig.at .05   **Sig. at .025   ***Sig. at .01

Table 3 shows that the gender differences in legislative priorities suggested in Table 2 are not merely a reflection of institutional differences or other variables thought to be associated with issue priorities. Controlling for a variety of institutional, political, and personal characteristics, gender still has a significant[14] effect on the nature of the legislative priorities of a legislative leader.[15] It is, in fact, the strongest indicator of such an agenda. Controlling for other factors, the percentage of female friendly issue priorities noted by women leaders is over twenty-five percent higher than that of their male counterparts. The relationship is the only one to be statistically significant at a .001 level (one-tailed test).

While our variable of interest here is the gender of the leader, most of the other variables behave as expected and two of them are statistically significant at .05 or less in a one-tailed test.

Nonwhite leaders are significantly more likely than their white colleagues to support an agenda that is more in line with traditional female roles, despite the fact that only one of the twenty-two minority leaders responding to the survey was a woman. Clearly, ethnicity matters in the legislative agendas of state legislative leaders, with nonwhite leaders supporting an agenda that is significantly different from that of their white counterparts. In terms of position, senior leaders, contrary to our expectations, are more free to support a female friendly agenda than their newer, less senior colleagues. In terms of position, those in critical leadership positions are less likely to support a female-oriented agenda, perhaps feeling that an agenda that is more "mainstream" might be more appropriate for their position. Finally, institutional characteristics matter, with leaders in more professional state legislative institutions tending to support agendas that are more reflective of women's issues, even though professional state legislatures tend to have a lower proportion of women members (Squire 1992) and committee chairs (Darcy 1996), perhaps reinforcing Welch's (1985) finding that fewer women in the legislature does not inhibit a women's agenda. Contrary to expectations, leaders from the South are significantly more likely to express interest in issues important to women. Perhaps this can be attributed to the higher demand for social services in the south in light of the higher levels of poverty, illiteracy, and limited access to quality health care. As expected, women leading caucuses with a greater proportion of women, but at $p = .07$, the relationship falls short of the traditional measure of statistical significance (.05).

In all, six of the nine variables reach traditional measures of statistical significance. However, controlling for all of these factors, women remain significantly more likely to express an interest in a female friendly agenda than do their male counterparts. While the overall model explains only about twelve percent of the variation in issue agendas, the model is statistically significant and is not very different from the results of similar studies of rank and file members (Barrett 1995; Dolan and Ford 1995). Indeed, the results of this study strongly suggest that women legislators maintain their unique agendas even when elected to the powerful and pressing positions of leadership.

Conclusion: a distinct view from the top

It was argued above that there are a number of reasons to expect women leaders not to have an agenda that is distinct from that of their male counterparts. Leaders are so constrained by the institutional and political demands of leadership that they have to moderate their own agendas. Therefore, women who are similar to their male counterparts might be more likely to ascend to a position of leadership. However, the results presented here indicate that women leaders support a distinct legislative agenda in spite of these pressures and potential selective recruitment biases. Women are more likely to support agendas that address traditional issues of concern to women, including health care, social services, women, family, and children's issues, and the environment. They are less likely to focus on taxes, budget matters, public safety, institutional regulation and matters of insurance or product liability. Further, differences between male and female leadership agendas remain significant even in the context of a variety of other factors generally associated with more liberal policy positions.

Our research suggests that women do not lose their distinctive perspective just because they rise to the top of their institution. Indeed, the gender of the leader appears to be the most significant indicator of the view from the top, having a more significant effect than party, race, experience, the nature of the position, or region. As women become an increasingly important

part of state legislatures and their leadership structures, these findings will become increasingly relevant to public policy. If women do indeed bring a different agenda to leadership, the effect of the growing number of women leaders may alter the direction of government in the states for the near and long-term future. As the federal government continues to shift responsibilities back to the state level, the unique agendas of women state legislative leaders will take on even greater significance.

However, before we assume that a policy shift of revolutionary proportions is just around the corner, we must consider two alternative scenarios of the future. First, while women clearly bring a different agenda to the table, these results cannot attest to the degree that they are willing or able to see that agenda voted into policy (although the work of Jewel1 and Whicker 1994, suggests as much). Further research needs to be conducted to determine the degree to which women leaders can translate their agendas into public policy. Research is also needed to determine if the agendas of women leaders remain unique as they become more common in leadership ranks (as suggested by the work of Thomas 1994), or if their agendas become less distinct from men's as their numbers increase and they adopt more careerist strategies (as suggested by the work of Welch 1985). While our results show that women leaders have a different legislative agenda than their male counterparts, future research will determine just how significant their effect will be on the policies adopted by future state governments.

Notes

1. Leadership positions include Speakers, Presidents, Floor Leaders and Pro Tempores .
2. The State Legislative Leaders Foundation distributes a survey to all state legislative leaders every two years in order to complete The Handbook of State Legislative Leaders.
3. This definition of legislative leadership is chosen for theoretical as well as practical reasons. Theoretically, these are the leaders with the most wide-ranging influence on policy, having an effect on every piece of legislation that is considered. Further, in most states, committee chairs owe their position and influence to the leaders in these positions. From a practical standpoint, we do not possess the resources to survey the more than 2,000 state legislators serving as Chairs or Co-Chairs of standing committees in order to replicate the data available for these leaders.
4. Use of these positions assures us of including all key partisan and institutional leaders since no position is present in every state or every legislative chamber and the responsibilities associated with a given position vary significantly across the country.
5. While some might consider such a subjective measure inadequate, a measure reflecting the nature of bills introduced was rejected for several reasons. First, it is impractical to gather such data across ninety-nine legislative institutions. Second, leaders in many states are forbidden from introducing legislation, or do not do so out of tradition, so that such a measure would be an inaccurate reflection of their agenda. Finally, surveys have been used successfully to ascertain the issue positions of women legislators in the rank and file (Barrett 1995; Dolan and Ford 1995; Thomas 1994). Unfortunately, in relying on such survey data rather than actual bills supported, we, like others who have used similar measures, are unable make fine distinctions between types of legislation within a general area. We cannot determine whether a respondent who claims that "welfare" is an important issue supports reforming it, expanding it, or killing it.

6. While some literature indicates that women are as concerned about crime as men, these references were specifically to efforts to get tough on crime or criminals, or to efforts to improve the rights of victims. Mentions made toward criminal rehabilitation were coded as social welfare issues.
7. One concern with a proportional measure is that it may not give an accurate reflection of priorities if one group tends to give significantly more responses than the other. In this case, there is no significant difference in the average number of responses provided by female (2.6827) and male (2.4074) respondents.
8. Ethnicity is coded as white and nonwhite. The sample included eight black members (one female), six Hispanic members (no female) and six Asian or Pacific Island members (no female).
9. Lower chambers are expected to be more receptive to female agendas for two reasons. First, the proportion of female members is higher in these chambers (currently 18.0 percent in the upper chambers and 22.6 percent in lower chambers). Second, previous research suggests that differences between terms in office and district size make lower chambers more responsive to their districts (Dye 1961) and more likely to reflect the growing female constituency as women become a majority of the voting coalition in many states and districts.
10. In a sense, this variable serves as a surrogate for legislative seniority, which could not be ascertained for all respondents because of data limitations.
11. A key leader was defined as the person responsible for making committee assignments in their respective chamber as described in Erickson, 1998. Where this decision was made by a committee or the caucus, no key leader was assigned.
12. A term interacting tenure with gender was considered, with the possibility that senior female leaders might be more, not less, prone to female oriented agendas, but the inclusion of such a variable created significant multicollinearity problems (correlated with gender at ,747) and was therefore not included in the model. Further, given that most of the senior leaders are male, the assumption of tenure being negatively associated with female oriented agendas seems even more reasonable.
13. The South includes the eleven states of the confederacy: Virginia, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, Georgia, Alabama, and Arkansas.
14. Significance is measured as one-tailed since we have predicted the direction of the relationships. A variable is considered statistically significant if T is .05 or less.
15. While this statistical approach does allow for us to control for the effect of some variables and key characteristics on the relationship between men and women leaders, it does not allow for us to control for interaction effects. While such information would be interesting, the limited number of women in the sample prohibit such analysis, because of the inherent problems of multicollinearity.

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APPENDIX
A Comparison of the Population and Sample of Leaders

	Population	Sample
Gender		
Male	88.9%	88.5%
Female	11.1%	11.5%
Ethnicity		
White	92.8%	91.5%
Black	2.4%	2.6%
Hispanic	3.0%	3.4%
Other	1.8%	2.6%
Legislative Chamber		
House	53.6%	54.5%
Senate	45.8%	45.1%
Unicameral	.6%	.4%
Party		
Republican	47.9%	49.4%
Democrat	52.1%	50.6%
Leadership Position		
Senate President	9.0%	8.9%
President Pro Tempore	11.7%	11.5%
Majority Leader	26.0%	25.1%
Minority Leader	27.2%	27.7%
Speaker	15.0%	16.2%
*Speaker Pro Tempore	11.1%	10.6%

* Includes the Chairperson of the Executive Board of Legislative Council in Nebraska.