

THE DISCRIMINATING POWER OF ECOLOGICAL VARIABLES IN THE RECRUITMENT OF MEN AND WOMEN RURAL POLITICIANS

WOODROW JONES
San Diego State University
RACHEL STARR
Montana State University

The growth of political activism by women has been studied mostly in the urban environment. The rural environment and those factors which predict the recruitment of women in that environment were the focus in this study. A survey of 192 women and 113 men elicited the effect of sex on the political recruitment process in the rural parts of Oregon. The sample is composed of politicians at the local level as well as the lower house of the state legislature. The findings indicate that the traditional variables from the literature of political recruitment tend to be more supportive of men rather than women. Further, that the ecological setting is important in determining the recruitment pattern of men and women politicians.

Keywords: ecological variables, rural politicians, recruitment, gender.

The growth of women involvement in electoral politics has created a reassessment of the literature of political recruitment. Despite the heavy influx of women candidates in urban settings, little, if any, research has been conducted on women who are recruited to political office in rural settings. Karnig and Walter (1976) found that sexism and the type of community are the most important deterrents to women seeking political office. Kirkpatrick (1974) illuminates the role conflict and dispensability faced by many women which prevent the active recruitment to politics. Kraus (1974) points to the burden of electioneering and the office itself as deterrents for women on the local level. Regardless of those findings, a more systematic understanding of these problems to rural women has not been undertaken.

The analysis of female candidate recruitment has been conceptualized by two different approaches. The first approach stressed the ecological factors of the recruitment process and the success of women candidates. The second approach focused on the role problems of women as political candidates. The approach taken in this paper is more the former than the latter. The ecological approach has several important advantages to the study of women in rural politics. Sigelman (1976) found the ecological approach was useful in correlating state political culture with the actual quantity and quality of female public employment. The principal finding of Sigelman was that women did better in terms of employment when they worked in states of the more traditional setting. In contrast, women in progressive states fared much worse because of the competition with minorities, a strong political machine, or because of an incumbent. Thus, the success of women candidates was attributed less to the individual's role performance and more to the setting of that role.

Another important area of debate over the ecological approach centers on the importance of socioeconomic characteristics in predicting who is recruited to political office. Seligman (1974) stipulates a number of effective factors in determining success for all politicians. All politicians were urbanized, mobile, sophisticated, and ambition-aware, and were the skilled elements in the population. Kraus found similar results in his analysis of women politicians seeking higher political office. In fact, Kraus points to the different environmental conditioning of men and women actually facilitating male recruitment and precluding female recruitment. Karnig and Walter (1976) conclude that such socioeconomic factors indicate the sexist nature of American politics, a view which is held by numerous women scholars and supported by most surveys of women. The question of this paper is to test and examine whether women in rural settings differ significantly from men given the ecological setting. If there are significant differences we will be better able to discuss the factors which are more useful in explaining recruitment practices in rural politics.

METHOD

PROCEDURE

To investigate the effects of sex on the political recruitment process in rural areas a mail questionnaire was constructed. Responses of a sample of 113 men and 192 women on various demographic, political and ecological variables were collected in Oregon, with 90% of the sample from what can be defined as rural by census tract information. The sample is composed of men and women who hold office in the lower house of the state legislature and city councils. The questionnaire return rate was over 80% of the population sampled. To ensure an adequate sample, various techniques were used to gather additional responses from individuals who did not respond to the original questionnaire. Upon inspection, we were able to conclude that there were no significant differences between the population and the sample universe.

Several techniques easily suggest themselves as means of examining the differences between men and women politicians. Our choice of techniques must be guided by the research question that we are trying to answer. The central question in this paper is the relationship between the political, socioeconomic background, and the ecological variables upon the recruitment of men and women. Secondly, we are concerned about the best discriminator between men and women politicians given their social context.

The predictive problem of discriminant analysis focuses on a set of independent variables which predict to the categories of the dependent variable. The primary assumption of the model is that the objects or units can be classified by a set of discriminating variables whose values will depend upon the groups of which they are members. As a result of the discriminant function, boundaries are established between the groups enabling the classification of individuals into the actual groups they belong to. The cross-tabulation of the predicted groups' membership with the actual group membership creates a matrix which indicates how accurate the predictor variables are in predicting the nominal categories. An evaluation of the number of hits and misses in the classification table allows an assessment of the worth of predictors. A test of the validity of the discriminant model can be achieved by the split-half procedure.

This procedure is performed by splitting the sample in half and using the discrimi-

nant function to test the validity of the prediction equations. The nominal categories of the discriminant analysis will be the gender of the politician. Community characteristics, the background of the respondent, and the type of office held were used as the independent variables in this study. In sum, the results of the discriminant analysis will attest to two important questions which are central to the analysis: (1) Which of the predictor variables are good discriminators between men and women politicians? (2) How well do these variables discriminate between men and women politicians?

Thus the strategy of the procedure allows the careful examination of a series of variables in order to find the best discriminator between men and women in the rural environment.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the factor structure for men and women for each of the ecological variables. Of the 13 original variables used to represent the ecological structure of office holders, 9 were found to be statistically significant. The overall ability to discriminate using our set of predictors is indicated by the canonical correlation for men and women. As expected, the ecological variables predict more of the explained variance for men than for women (36% vs. 9%). An approximate F test for each canonical correlation indicates significance at .05.

TABLE 1
FACTOR STRUCTURE OF THE DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION FOR PREDICTORS OF RURAL OFFICE HOLDERS
ACCORDING TO SEX

Predictor variables	Men	Women
Number of offices held*	0.60	0.22
Population size of community*	0.41	0.32
Number of relatives in politics*	0.53	0.31
Length of residence	0.25	0.35
Family income*	0.35	0.45
Organization participation*	0.45	0.47
Organizational leadership*	0.56	0.33
Personal average income*	0.46	0.23
Parental-child occupational difference*	0.57	0.25
Parental-child educational difference*	0.60	0.21
Number of appointive offices held	0.27	0.18
Number of elective offices held	0.29	0.10
Canonical correlation	0.65	0.33

$$\text{Discriminant function equation} = 0.45X_1 + 1.23X_2 + 2.30X_3 + 1.3X_4 + 1.10X_5 + 0.9X_6 + 2.1X_7 + 3.2X_8 + 0.45X_9$$

*Significant at $p < .05$

In examining the overall discrimination structure for men we find higher loadings on those items which are central to political recruitment in a rural setting. Previous experience in politics and relatives in politics are important ingredients for rural politics. However, when comparing the type of offices held by males and females in the sample, the resulting discriminant loadings indicate that elective offices rather than appointive offices are most important for men. Another contributing factor is the educational differences between parent and the child. For men that difference is indi-

cated by a higher loading which is indicative of the generational mobility in education between them and their parents. In the case of women there was less of a difference between their educational background. Thus, less educational mobility and more appointive office-holding are unique problems for the rural woman. Several observations can be made in regard to political participation as a predictor. Organizational participation and organizational leadership are two important predictors derived from the study of political recruitment. The higher level of participation among rural women, yet the lack of organizational leadership, is indicated by our discriminant loadings. Apparently, women perform of the nonleadership functions of the many social organizations of the community but do not hold a significant amount of leadership experience comparison with men. However, the difference between men and women politicians is not as high as on the other measures.

In examining more direct measures of the ecological environment such as city size, family income, personal income, and length of residence, several observations can be noted. The family income of a candidate seems to be a more important predictor of women office-holders than men, whereas personal income is an important determinant for men rather than women. Apparently, women who are recruited to politics tend to derive much of their recruitment power from family position, but men have to be established on their own. On the other hand length of residence is a strong discriminant between men and women. Although the loading on city size is higher for men and the opposite in the case of length of residence, it cannot be concluded that these differences are significant. However, we can conclude that the length of residence is an important variable for women politicians.

CONCLUSION

In examining the ecological predictors of men and women politicians in rural Oregon, we found that they differ only in quality to that of the politician indicated by the literature of political recruitment. Politicians are usually assumed to be representatives of a higher social class in any community. In the comparison of men and women we found this assertion to be essentially true for politicians in rural communities.

In examining a set of ecological variables which compared women and men office-holders we found that the traditional variables of recruitment tended to be more supportive of men than women. Women office-holders tended to have more organizational participation and to have been long-time residents of the area in which they were elected. On all other discriminating variables women were significantly lower than men in the discriminant equation. When controlling for the type and number of offices held, the data show that appointive offices are more prone to be both the initial and final offices held by most women.

The findings suggest that rural women do differ from rural men in political office-holding. However, there are a myriad of micro-level conditions discouraging women from office-holding which cannot be accounted for by survey analysis. As a result of these factors we can see no real effect of current women activism on rural population. The data suggest that the ecological nature of the rural culture discourages females from seeking elective and appointive offices in politics.

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