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# Leading Ladies: Women in Southern Politics

Jennifer Leaphart

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LEADING LADIES: WOMEN IN SOUTHERN POLITICS

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
Graduation with Honors from the  
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### Thesis Summary

The lack of women serving in state legislatures across the South is a persistent problem in the twenty-first century. Even while other states, such as Vermont or Colorado, make strides in eventually attaining gender parity, many of the eleven former states of the Confederacy have either remained constant in or decreased the composition of women in their state assemblies. This is a significant problem as entire issues, specifically those that most concern women, children, and families, may be entirely absent from legislative discourse when women are not present. The low ratio of female to male legislators found in southern legislatures has many contributing factors and no simple solution.

The history of the South fostered a sense of deep-rooted conservatism and paternalism. One of the legacies of the plantation system found in southern states was a patriarchal family structure that subordinated women as second-class citizens and made it very difficult for southern women to attain equal status with men in society. Consequently, traditional gender roles in the South are extremely strong and may discourage women from running for public office. Religion, a strong influence on southern society, poses another hurdle for women seeking political office. Evangelical Protestants are particularly strong in the southern region, and they report holding extremely conservative social beliefs, which is not beneficial to women winning elective office. Unequal education poses another problem for women, especially women of color, in the region. The poor state of public education in the South stunts the growth of many women, politically and professionally. Furthermore, the

traditionalistic political culture found in southern states is not conducive to female candidates. Ultimately, women are unlikely to select themselves to run for office.

Recruitment by political parties and other organizations could help to solve this problem. However, male political party leaders are less likely to recruit women to run for office, and the South lacks many women in leadership positions within political parties. The “good old boy” network remains strong in the South, making it less likely for women to be recruited to run for office. National PACs, such as EMILY’s List, may help to recruit women into political office. Statewide PACs have been particularly successful in helping women win seats. Public finance reform for campaigns is also a viable option to increase women in state legislatures. The structure of southern state legislatures also poses problems. Low professionalization and single member districts, universally used in the South, are not as conducive for women to run and win office compared to multimember districts. Majority-minority districts pose their own problems for women who choose to run for office, although more research is needed in this area.

While many politicians work their way up the electoral ladder, women who hold local office in the South are usually found in more clerical positions that do not translate into higher office. Most southern states have proven that as they develop, more women have entered their state legislatures. National, emergent, and traditional southern states show varying levels of female state legislators. In general, as a state develops, its immigration, income levels, and percentage of college educated population increases. All of these things aid in electing more women. Ultimately, though, women must encourage each other to achieve political office.

## Abstract

The following paper presents the issues contributing to the lack of female representation in southern states. Throughout the work, the South is defined as the former eleven states of the Confederacy. Using statistical data from reputable centers and government organizations, personal interviews, and incorporating previous national research on women and politics, findings show that women face unique factors when considering to run for office and even winning political office. The South's social and political culture, state legislature structure, and lack of state recruitment organizations and PACs specifically for female candidates all compound together to strengthen the probability that women in the South will not run for elective office. However, as southern states experience increasing in-migration, leading to a more educated electorate with a higher per capital income, more women may run for and win political office. Encouraging young women to think of politics as a gender-neutral field, especially through the power of role models, is necessary to increase female representation in the South.

## I. Introduction

The South as a whole has a very complex relationship with women – the land that created the myth of the white “Southern Belle” was also the land that created the reality of Sojourner Truth. In cultivating its idealized image of the lady, the region celebrated a certain kind of southern woman and alienated a vast number of others. The traditional culture of the South perpetuates the continuity of the old order. After all, southern legislatures were where the Equal Rights Amendment went to die. Ultimately, it is really not surprising that of the eleven former states of the Confederacy, considered the South for the purposes of this thesis, ten rank in the bottom half of the fifty states when it comes to female representation in state legislatures. Half of the states that populate the ultimate bottom ten of that same list are southern states (CAWP). It is important to take this total lack of gender parity seriously. Research has shown that when women are left out of political discourse in legislatures, there are entire issues, particularly those pertaining to women, children, and family, that are ignored (Ford 199). Senator Brad Hutto, a Democrat in the South Carolina Senate, shared that “just one woman changes the dynamic in the Senate” (Hutto). South Carolina, long infamous for only topping the lists that no states want to top, is currently the worst state in the nation for domestic-homicide in which men kill women (Phillips). Women, bringing their own life experiences, need to be in seats in the South Carolina House and Senate to ensure that issues like this are addressed. “In states that had the lowest percentages of women in their legislatures, no bills related to women, children, and the family were introduced by either men or women” (Ford 199). Women’s representation should not

be relegated as a minor concern, as it is important to the status of women in the South and ensuring that the region as a whole develops.

In order to examine the dearth of women in political office in the region, one must consider a number of cultural and political institutions that limit women's opportunities in politics. Since culture helps to set the course for political behavior, it is important to remember the enduring patriarchy of southern society as well as its celebration of femininity in its white women as one considers southern women's involvement at any level of southern politics. The inherent conservatism of the American South, combined with a lack of recruitment effort by state political parties and the existence of non-professionalized state legislatures with no term limits elected by purely single member districts, leads to a notable lack of women in southern politics compared to the rest of the United States. While women do have some success in local elections, they are limited by the traditional gender roles emphasized across the South, and this success has not always translated to state and federal office. Ultimately, southern women must envision themselves as candidates, something that is particularly difficult for many women everywhere. Role models provide one route to change women's perceptions of politics, especially for women of color. However, the South's lack of women in politics, not to mention lack of racially and ethnically diverse women politicians, makes this problematic. As the South is forced to move along into the future, in-migration to the region, along with increasing diversity, per capita income, and education levels, will hopefully provide a friendlier region for women to run for and win political office.

## II. Past as Prelude

To understand modern southern politics and women's place within it, one must first understand the region's past. The myth of the grand, old South, and particularly of the "Southern Belle," is romanticized by Hollywood and literature and continues to resonate with many today, despite the fact that the old South is not a fairytale and the Southern Belle is just as mythical as a fairytale's beneficent princess. Antebellum southern, white women were "the victims...of an image which was at odds with the reality of their lives" (Scott x). This image of the white southern lady managed to survive the Civil War and Reconstruction and even "continued to shape the behavior of southern women for many years and has never entirely disappeared" (Scott x). This image has everything to do with the society that formulated and celebrated it.

The structure of southern society is quite literally rooted in the South's past. The fertile soil and warm climate allowed Southerners to grow a variety of crops, and it was geography that decreed the development of a plantation culture that flourished in the antebellum South (Woodard 8). The old South was dependent upon this traditional planter-aristocracy, which made the South and its people steadfastly planted in "the patriarchal family structure" (Scott 10). The fertile soil dictated a culture rooted in familial ties and conservatism from the very beginning. This paternalistic culture established norms and patterns that kept women subordinate citizens and made it more difficult for women in the South to achieve equal status with the male citizens of southern states (Wolfe 130). In her essay, Wolfe goes on to note that southern women face a triad of "handicaps" when fighting for equal rights. She first notes the stigma of being southern and all the weight of the South's history and legends that attaches to a

woman. A second stigma is that of being a female in the South, particularly the limitations of the southern woman found in the “constraining images of the belle and the lady.” The final stigma is concerned with race in the South, as it applies to the experience of black women as well as, although indirectly, white women (Wolfe 127). As the struggle to gain equal rights already suffered from the South’s inherent patriarchy and conservatism, it is little wonder that women in the South struggle even today when it comes to deciding to run for office.

The importance of familial ties and the power of patrician southern families granted a very small amount of early success to southern women beginning in the 1920s. According to statistics provided by the Center for American Women and Politics, eight of the eleven southern states either appointed or used special elections to select women to serve in the U.S. Congress or various statewide positions. The overwhelming majority of the time, women served out terms following the death of a late husband or were appointed to a position by their husband. Politics in the South was, and some would say still is, a family affair. For example, it was not terribly contested when Alabama Governor Graves appointed his wife, known simply as “Miss Dixie,” to the U.S. Senate in 1937. Through this appointment, she was the first woman to ever address the U.S. Senate on a piece of pending legislation, in particular an anti-lynching bill. She railed against the bill using states’ rights as her cause and was hailed in her native South for her “poise, dignity, and charm” (Burge 271). She not only upheld the poisonous racist sentiments prevalent in the South at the time, but she supported the southern construct of an indomitable patriarchal society. One may consider Miss Dixie the prototype of many southern white women, such as Elizabeth

Dole, a North Carolina debutante with a Harvard law degree, who has never failed to use her image as a southerner to gain political advantage (Gutgold 97). However, if Miss Dixie was such a success as the southern papers painted her, why is it that southern women have severely lagged behind their other American counterparts when running for and holding political office?

That same patriarchy and conservatism that praised Miss Dixie's poise and charm also arguably discourages women from running for and holding political office. Despite a number of issues separating the South from the rest of the nation resolving over the years, "analyses indicate that southern attitudes are the most traditional when the topic is women in politics" (Woodard 378). Beyond revealing the weak appeal feminism holds for many southerners, men and women alike, the fact that nine of the fifteen state legislatures that killed the Equal Rights Amendment were former Confederate states more than suggests the struggle women in the South face when pursuing public office (Wolfe 135). Outside of the troublesome pursuit of political office, the true power of traditional gender roles in the South was revealed.

It can be argued that the power of traditional gender roles in southern states may strengthen the impact of the "Double Bind" in which so many female professionals and politicians find themselves. In essence, working women who have left their "proper sphere" face a particularly challenging and harsh public judgment. Women who succeed professionally are seen as failing in their "womanly" duties, and women who do not succeed professionally were wrong to have ever entered the public sphere in the first place (Lawless and Fox 60). It's a disturbing catch-22 that male politicians never have to consider, not just in the South, but across the nation and world. Liane Sorenson,

president of the Women's Legislative Network of the National Conference on State Legislatures as well as a state legislator in Delaware's Senate, describes the reality perfectly, "If a male lawmaker leaves a meeting to watch his son play soccer, everyone says he's a wonderful father. But if a women does it, you'll hear she's not managing her responsibilities" (Lawless and Fox 60). If this is the reality outside the South where gender norms are not as entrenched in a heavily conservative culture, then the pressure that southern women of all races face must be nearly unbearable. It demands near perfection in both private and public life in order to succeed. In and of itself, that sort of expectation and pressure is discouraging to women who are otherwise eligible candidates. Sally Harrell was a state representative in Georgia who served for six years. After those years, with a family and two small children, she did not seek reelection stating that a campaign would be "destructive for [her] family" (Lawless and Fox 65). The importance and pressure placed upon the role of the mother and wife in the private sphere is an impediment to women who are otherwise reasonably situated for a candidacy.

One of the many cultural sources that solidifies the strength of traditional attitudes toward women in southern states is the power of religion in the region. The former South Carolina Republican Party Chairwoman, Karen Floyd, describes her working outside the home as an unusual choice for her neighborhood and still highly "nontraditional." In an early 2011 interview with *The Atlantic*, she quite simply stated, "We are in the Bible Belt... Change comes slowly" (Rosin). Research has found that the Religious Right has become strongest in southern states (Religious). This is not surprising given the cultural importance of religion in a region where all eleven former

Confederate states but one, the usual exception of Florida, exceed the national average of 39 percent when it comes to attending at least one religious service a week according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Indeed, five of those eleven states far exceed the national average with at least half of their citizens polled attending one or more religious services weekly. This would not be a concerning issue for women and politics except for the fact that in a nation where only about a quarter of those polled by the Pew Forum report being Evangelical Protestants, a whopping 50 percent live in one region, the South.

As a whole, the social and political views reported by Evangelical Protestants have a conservative bent. Pew Forum polls reveal more than half report believing in conservative ideology, with 61 percent claiming abortion, so often used as a litmus test and an issue that concerns many women, should be illegal in all or most cases. Perhaps the most revealing of the Pew Forum's telling polls when it comes to the participation of women in public office at any level is that 59 percent of Evangelical Protestants say they believe the Bible is the Word of God and every word of it is literally true. This includes passages such as, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet" (*New International Version Bible*, 1 Timothy 2.12). The power of religion in the region is a limiting influence on women in office as it pushes for increasing conservatism in an already conservative region. Given that "women ultimately have more success in more politically liberal regions," the states of the South trail behind the rest of the nation's states in women holding political office (Thomas 116). The conservatism of the region gives way to a number of political institutions and circumstances that hinder women in pursuing and gaining political positions.

One of those circumstances is the state of public education in many southern states, specifically in rural areas where young African American children, boys and girls, are disproportionately ignored and, in effect, receive a separate and unequal education compared to their peers in wealthier, often whiter, districts. This problem is not a secret, having been highlighted by national figures and documentaries such as the *Corridor of Shame*. Unequal education has persisted in the rural South in spite of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision over half a century ago. In 1993, *Tennessee Small School Systems v. McWhorter* was filed, with the plaintiffs complaining that their more rural, smaller districts in Tennessee were not affording students an equal education compared to better-funded urban and suburban districts. The Tennessee Supreme Court agreed that “constitutionally impermissible disparities in the education opportunities” were found in the state’s public school system (Tennessee Small School Systems). In South Carolina, *Abbeville County School District, et. al. v. The State of South Carolina* first came forward in 1993. A number of rural school districts joined in this case with Abbeville County School District to argue the unfair funding of rural districts in South Carolina and their inability to provide an equitable education compared to wealthier districts (Abbeville County School District). These districts are in overwhelmingly poor and situated in counties with higher African American populations. For example, Abbeville County is composed of 72.9 percent African Americans, and 36.3 percent of the general population actually lives below the poverty line (Census Quick Facts). This theme continues with Lee County and Bamberg County, both of which had school districts that were plaintiffs in the case. Both counties are over half African American and over a quarter of their respective general

populations live in poverty according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Whole segments of the population in many southern states are not receiving their right to an adequate, free education. The state of education in the South unfairly denies the possibility to countless poor women to educate themselves in a way that would place them in the pool of suitable political candidates. Specifically, it is African American women, as one can see in the statistics above, who suffer from the subpar educational opportunities offered in many rural schools, such as those in the Corridor of Shame in South Carolina.

Attorney Steve Morrison, representing the school districts in *Abbeville v. State*, said, “The state has systematically segregated our poorest African American children into rural ghettos. And having herded them into those ghettos, the state has systematically refused to provide adequate funding that would produce a constitutionally adequate education in those districts” (Monk). By not offering an adequate education to countless young African American girls, the state of South Carolina has sufficiently stunted the growth of many of these women both professionally and politically.

Moreover, lagging education levels among the electorate is less conducive to the election of female candidates even when they do run, and less educated people typically hold elected officials less accountable for their actions (Thomas 108). Education advocacy is necessary to alleviate this issue that exists in many rural southern areas.

### III. The Power of Southern Traditionalism

There are three political cultures relevant to the study of American politics according to political scientist Daniel Elazar. These three major cultures – traditionalistic, moralistic, and individualistic – reveal the divides that run through the nation and validate the distinct flavor of southern politics. In the traditionalistic subculture, which has dominated the American South, “political participation is discouraged, voter turnout is low, and leadership is entrusted to a governing elite” (Woodard 7). Predictably, women as the political newcomers in a region that values continuity and tradition have not found unbounded success. Using indices of political culture, all eleven states of the South fall into the traditionalistic political culture, even those of Texas and Florida, both of which have a comparatively individualistic subculture to other southern states (Johnson 497). Both South Carolina and Alabama fall into the traditionalistic culture with a 0.999 probability (Johnson 497). South Carolina is ranked as forty-ninth out of the fifty states concerning women in the state legislature; the percentage of women sitting in the State House in Columbia, S.C. as legislators comes in at ten percent. Likewise, Alabama falls as the forty-seventh state, with 13.6 percent female composition of its state legislators. The only southern state to break into the top half of the list of states with the highest proportion of female state legislators is Florida, where women make up 25.6 percent of the state legislature (CAWP). Granted, as mentioned earlier, Florida does not quite share the same singular dedication to the traditionalistic political culture as the rest of the region.

In comparison and as an important point of reference, the majority of the states that have excelled at electing women to their state legislatures exhibit a moralistic

political culture (Johnson 496). States with moralistic political cultures are more likely to collectively view government as a positive force for promoting public good.

Moreover, citizens of these states are likely to place a higher value in serving to benefit the public (Canache 28). In 2013, Vermont held the honor of having the highest ratio of women to men in its legislature; even then, it was under half women at 41.1 percent (CAWP). Compared to South Carolina with its 0.999 probability of traditionalistic political culture, Vermont, falling into the category of moralistic culture, has only a .003 probability traditionalistic subculture using political culture indices (Johnson 496).

Even states that exhibit a primarily individualistic political culture have shown progress where southern states have stagnated. Illinois, Maryland, and New Jersey, ranking seventh, eighth, and tenth respectively for number of women in their state legislatures, fall into the individualistic category of states (Johnson 496; CAWP). The individualistic political culture stresses the importance of “effective private action” that “government should seek to foster, not to replace;” therefore, government is not quite seen in as positive a light compared to moralistic culture’s views (Canache 28). The individualistic political culture is undeniably present in the South, although its strength varies from state to state (Johnston 496-497). However, the overwhelming aptitude for the traditionalistic culture to dominate southern political thought weakens its influence. Moreover, the South’s strong collective sense of traditional gender roles would interplay differently with this individualistic culture that stresses the importance of business and limiting government action compared to a Midwestern Illinois or mid-Atlantic New Jersey.

The wide variation between women's representation in the South and states like Vermont and Washington prove that the struggle southern women have experienced in making the decision to run for office and winning the seat has not been the average one for all American women. As the traditional political culture dictates that governing is left to the elite, wealthy white men in the South's case, women do not often self-select themselves to run. Even statistics from the mid-1990s reveal telling differences between American regions when the topic is women in political office. In New England, a region where moralistic culture dominates, women composed about 25 percent of state legislatures as early as 1994. However, Alabama's state legislature lagged far behind, only comprised of 4.3 percent women in 1995 (Thomas 109). Ultimately, women in states and regions where moralistic political culture is predominant have been more likely to run for office than states with individualistic or traditionalistic cultures (Thomas 109). Past and current percentages show the great difference between the political cultures in generating a political environment that is conducive to encouraging women's participation by running for and holding office.

#### IV. The Problem of Self-Perception

There are undeniable differences in the psychology of men and women. In an extensive study on the underrepresentation of women in American government and politics, Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox delved into the difference in perspectives on personal achievement and qualifications that make women less likely political candidates. Women, unlike men, exhibit a tendency to underestimate their own qualifications and skills according to social psychologists (Lawless and Fox 96). Men, who tend actually to overestimate their own skill and exhibit overconfidence, were nearly twice as likely as women to perceive themselves as “very qualified” to run for an elected position in Lawless and Fox’s study (Lawless and Fox 98). One of the many women interviewed this study, a lawyer from Georgia, stated:

When I work with two male colleagues, they peacock around and always try to take credit for...everything we do. When I work with women, we’re more apt to work together. [Female lawyers] don’t care as much about our egos. But ego translates into confidence. So, when you turn to politics, which requires the highest levels of confidence, you see men who probably aren’t that qualified and women who just don’t think they have what it takes to be in politics. (Lawless and Fox 109)

Of course, this is not a condition that is peculiar to women in the South.

However, one may theorize that traditional cultural mores found across southern states exacerbate this condition of “never being good enough” that so many women impose upon themselves. Indeed, political scientists have found that a lack of full integration into public life can often lead women to withdraw from that public life. It is then not

surprising that the perception of sexism in election politics or public life in general can hinder a woman's willingness to engage in a bid for office (Lawless and Fox 104). The perception of sexism is not incorrect in a region where the average percentage of women in state legislatures is only 17.1 percent, according to 2014 statistics from the Center for American Women and Politics. However, outside of the former eleven Confederate states, the average number of women who sit in state legislatures in 2014 is slightly over a quarter of the body at 25.8 percent. It is not surprising that many women, as logical humans with limited resources and time, do not lightly enter into battles they see themselves as unlikely to win.

Many southern women simply do not envision themselves as candidates, regardless of their qualifications. Beth Watson is a personable, educated native South Carolinian. She holds a Master of Public Administration from the University of South Carolina and currently serves as Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees of Lexington-Richland School District Five. In an interview, she simply stated, "I didn't consider myself a candidate... I originally did not consider myself qualified. I was intimidated to run at first" (Watson). She went on to explain that she attended countless school board meetings and even led a school bond referendum before deciding to throw her hat in the ring. Yet, in her own experience, "[M]en will jump into a race, and qualifications don't matter. For example, men have run for school board and never even attended a meeting" (Watson). Fortunately, in Ms. Watson's case, she possessed the moxie to confront her personal fears of running for office, along with having the encouragement of a mentor who already sat on the school board. Other southern female politicians echo her sentiments. North Carolina state representative Jean Preston who was

eventually recruited into running for her seat stated, “[Politics] was not anything I had ever thought about doing” (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). Turning again to Lawless and Fox’s comprehensive study of women and politics in America, they found that women’s self-perceptions which block them from considering political office as a viable option are often rooted in the expectations of the traditional society and a “masculinized ethos” that dominates politics and government, leading to a gender psyche in which women shy away from holding political office (Lawless and Fox 96). As mentioned with the case of Ms. Watson, role models and mentors are helpful when women are facing the decision to run or not to run and will be discussed when considering the future of female politicians in southern state legislatures. Another route to increase women’s membership in state houses may be through recruiting, which includes the actions of political parties, PACs, and other political organizations.

## V. Recruitment Efforts

Granted that many southern women are unlikely to self-select themselves to run for office, one of the solutions to increase the number of women in office is through recruitment. Yet, like so many issues in the South, this is not a simple solution. Kira Sanbonmatsu, a leading scholar on women in American politics, has found recruitment by political parties, when it does occur, can be a beneficial tool for women to achieve political office (*Where Women Run*). In the case of Jean Preston that was discussed earlier, recruitment by the political party was the ultimate persuasion that led her to run and win a seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives. Yet for every Jean Preston who is transformed from a merely eligible to actual candidate, how many women are passed over and not even thought of as a potential party nominee?

Nationally, Lawless and Fox found a startling gender gap when it comes to political recruitment (78). Political parties are traditionally male dominated clubs. A 1998 study by David Niven found that male party leaders had a noticeable preference for male candidates, elaborating that the “recruitment practices and experiences of party leaders and officeholders appear to embody a masculinized ethos that favors the selection of male candidates” (Lawless and Fox 84). Sanbonmatsu’s extensive research corroborates this observation, revealing “women leaders often drive party receptivity to women candidates and officeholders” (“Life’s a Party,” 39). This poses a particular problem in the South. Of the eleven former Confederate states, women chair only three state Democratic Parties and none of the state Republican Parties. In combination with the predominantly male legislatures of the South, this gives rise to a male-gendered social network of possible candidates in which a woman is the exception to the norm.

As part of Sanbonmatsu's extensive research for *Where Women Run*, she interviewed women and men in politics from a variety of states, including North Carolina and Alabama. She found that in North Carolina respondents emphasized the power of recruitment by parties, with many finding that recruiting "practices disadvantage women as a result of unconscious and unintentional processes"<sup>1</sup> (*Where Women Run*). To be more specific, she found that respondents in North Carolina would often use the term "good old boys' network" to explain their observations compared to similarly situated Ohio. Of the states she focused on during her research, Alabama was the only other state where respondents commonly spoke of this sort of network. Respondents outside of the South were much less common to reference "good ol' boys" when considering their states' recruitment of potential female candidates. For example, in Colorado, where 41 percent of the state legislature is female, the old boys' network was barely mentioned (*Where Women Run*; CAWP). Alabama may be maligned by stereotypes of old white, male politicians making back room deals, but these "stories" do develop from some sort of truth. The truth of the "good old boys' network" in Alabama is reflected in a percentage – only 14.3 percent of the state legislators sitting in Birmingham are women (CAWP).

Beth Watson, who currently chairs a school board and was referenced earlier, mentioned this network in her own interview, stating, "It is hard to break into it and break it up" (Watson). In her run for South Carolina Senate in 2002, she came face to face with one of the "Boss Hog" types encountered all too often in southern politics, but

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<sup>1</sup> Ms. Sanbonmatsu primarily compared North Carolina and Ohio in her research on recruitment by parties. This may be particularly useful, as according to statistics from the Center for American Women and Politics, the two states have very similar percentages of women in their respective state legislatures. While the statistics are similar, the experiences of many female candidates differ between the two states.

she saw the race through with the support of the S.C. Senate Democratic Caucus<sup>2</sup> (Watson). Ms. Watson did not win, but she certainly unsettled her Republican opponent, Jake Knotts, and made him conduct an actual campaign in a heavily conservative district. Although the South Carolina Senate continues to be a bastion for white men, she fought to make a chink in its armor, and sometimes, that is enough. Her actions and visibility as a female candidate in the South could and should inspire other women.

For the women who are contacted and recruited by state party leaders to run for office, Lawless and Fox's study shows no significant difference men's and women's reaction nationally. They found that "women are just as likely as men to respond positively to the suggestion to run...however, too few women, across parties, are encouraged to seek elective office (Lawless and Fox 93). However, Amanda Loveday, former Executive Director of the South Carolina Democratic Party, shared that she "talked to a potential female candidate for every race," and in her own experience, "[m]ore women have turned [her] down than men." Ms. Loveday cited a number of reasons she believed women, in her experience, were less susceptible to her encouragement on behalf of the S.C. Democratic Party and therefore did not enter races, including institutional factors that will be addressed in later sections. Ultimately, though, she ended the interview with this supposition:

This stereotype of "barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen" is stronger in the

South. It's easier for women in the remainder of the country to get over that, but

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<sup>2</sup> Ms. Watson encountered threats and intimidation tactics through her opponent, Jake Knotts, and did consider dropping out of the race. It was her middle school daughter who encouraged her to complete the race and "not give into these people." Family support of a political career for their daughters is important, as Lawless and Fox's research points out, but sons and daughters can also support their mother's political aspirations.

in the South, it's harder to break these kinds of barriers. You hear it in questions like, "Why aren't you home with your kids?" It's just more to overcome in this region than others. (Loveday)

In addition to the conservative culture and "good old boys' clubs," there are *still* also doubts about women's viability as a candidate. While "[w]here women run, women win," has become a popular slogan in the United States, some research has shown that some party leaders disagree with it. "Instead, beliefs about women's electability vary across states and districts" (Sanbonmatsu, "Life's a Party," 39). Recruitment, as a means to increase women's representation, is really only useful to the extent that party leadership believes that a woman's electability is equitable with a man's electability. North Carolinian respondents from Sanbonmatsu's research noted that they believed party leaders' subjective feelings on the viability of a female candidate had a negative impact in their state (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). Certain political scientists argue that party leaders are unconsciously discriminating against women with their proclivity to recruit candidates who look and act like themselves. In other words, their preference is usually for white males who have risen through the party ranks (Deckman, Dolan, and Swers 154). With the lack of female Democratic or Republican party leaders in the South, this theory poses a particular problem.

Ultimately, political parties have the goal of winning as many seats as possible. Therefore, party leaders want to recruit the best possible candidate who, most importantly, has the highest probability of winning (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). Ms. Loveday candidly admitted that the South Carolina Democratic Party's candidate

choice has almost everything to do with suitability and viability in the particular district a candidate would be running (Loveday). Statistically, “where women run, women win” is more than a slogan. Nationally, women running for open state house seats won 52.2 percent of their races; men won 53 percent of the time. What is more, southern female politicians overall were not found to be disadvantaged at any significant level. It is noteworthy, though, that in areas known for more equitable female representation in state legislatures, such as New England, female incumbents and challengers actually fared slightly better than their male counterparts (Ford 137). However, the perception of female electability by many southern party leaders exists in spite of statistics. With the focus on recruiting the most “sure-to-win” candidate in the eyes of party leadership, many women, as the political newcomers, are usually not the safest “bet” and are therefore often overlooked by recruiters or discouraged by party gatekeepers. Marsha Folsom, the former Executive Director of the Alabama Democratic Party, believes that certain voters in her state are unlikely to support a female candidate (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*).

With the perception of women’s electability and the actual statistics widely varying, the truth for the South may be found somewhere in between. Some have found that women’s electability does vary, and the South has not shown to be a favorable battleground for many women candidates. For example, “[A]lthough women made up 20 percent of open-seat primary candidates in Alabama, they comprised only 6 percent of general election winners of these open seats” (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). This perhaps can be explained by the extreme conservatism found throughout much of the South. Earlier research showed that while there was no real gender gap concerning

women's aptitude for politics, respondents with lower levels of education, those who self-identify as conservatives, and those of traditional religious views were all more likely to show some sort of prejudice against female candidates, including an aversion from casting a vote for them (Thomas 108). In addition, Sanbonmatsu writes that Republican women must overcome a stereotype of being more liberal than their male competitors in order to win. In a region where a number of states have become modified one-party Republican according to the Ranney Index as of 2010, this places a significant burden on a sizeable number of potential female candidates (Woodard 260). However, throughout the nation, it is Democratic women who seemingly make up the majority of the eligibility pool (Lawless and Fox 82). In intensely Republican states, the problem then becomes a very basic one: a very small pool will inevitably yield fewer candidates. Although this a concerning problem, the issue of female candidates in southern politics is so multivariate, that it is not in and of itself a decisive issue on female representation in state legislatures.<sup>3</sup>

The lack of active recruitment for women candidates in the South is an important issue. Women often need that initial push to run, particularly with the South's emphasis on traditional gender roles. One would imagine that as the number of women with the informal requirements to hold office grows, the number of women who do so would correspond. This is the essence of the pipeline theory (Lawless and Fox 26). For example, "[w]omen's progress in the field of law is typically correlated with representation of women" (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). Yet, as Lawless and

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<sup>3</sup> S.C. is a modified one-party Republican system on the Ranney Index and currently ranks 49<sup>th</sup> for women's representation in the state legislature. FL, however, is also a modified one-party Republican system and currently ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> for women's representation in the state legislature. Other factors and circumstances contribute. (Woodard 260; CAWP)

Fox consider, the true incorporation of women into positions of power within those pipeline professions may take much longer than most are willing to admit (26).

Progress will occur as the pool of eligible female candidates broadens, but it will be incremental progress based on current patterns (Lawless and Fox 28). In Alabama, women are now lawyers at much higher rates than legislators (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). The progress made in the legal sector does not automatically translate into the public sector. Women business-owners, another segment of the pipeline, also do not transfer directly to female representation. Colorado, Illinois, and Arizona, ranked first, eighth, and third respectively for the proportion of female legislators at the state level, showed similar percentages of female ownership of business firms as Alabama, Texas, and Virginia, ranked forty-seventh, thirty-second, and fortieth respectively (Census Quick Facts; CAWP).

Ultimately, Sanbonmatsu finds that women in general are simply less likely to plan political careers. Where many men plan to enter politics and envision themselves as candidates starting at an earlier age, many women do not picture themselves as the political candidate, even those that work on campaigns and become involved in politics in that way (*Where Women Run*). Similarly situated men and women in the candidate eligibility pool do not exhibit the same levels of political ambition. This is found to hold with different racial variables (Lawless and Fox 47). Alabama state Representative Jeanette Greene argued that, especially in Alabama, the problem is that the political realm is so male dominated that women just don't see themselves as candidates (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). These gendered social networks of

southern legislatures and the state political parties have failed to adequately address this problem and fill the void of female legislators through recruiting efforts.

Perhaps making up for political parties' lackadaisical effort in recruiting female candidates, women's organization, PACs, and donor networks play an important role in encouraging women to achieve political office (Sanbonmatsu, "Life's a Party," 39). In fact, a number of women's groups and PACs were formed out of the failures of political parties to recruit female candidates, and the goals of many of these groups may still contend against the party goals. However, when these PACs and groups work, they really do work, as seen in the 1992 "Year of the Woman," when a record number of women were elected to U.S. Congress beyond the control of party nominations (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). Yet, the South is lacking in these resources. According to the Center for American Women and Politics, three southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi) do not have any state donor network or PAC available specifically for women. Of the southern states that do have these valuable resources available to female candidates, only four organizations are non-partisan; the remaining PACs and donor networks found in southern states are resources only available to pro-choice, Democratic women (Women's). This is beneficial to a great many women in the South, and it is good to note that the only state with more than one of these state organizations is Florida, the southern state with the highest proportion of women in the state assembly at 25.6 percent (Women's; CAWP). However, Florida is also of a slightly different political fabric than a number of southern states that are more uniformly conservative and Republican in their district makeup. Therefore, many state PACs are beneficial to a limited type of female candidate in the southern region.

The impact of women's PACs, both state and national, is very important. Lillian's List currently supports ten female candidates, including three African American women, seeking election to the North Carolina General Assembly (2014 Featured Candidates). Georgia's WIN List PAC supported six women candidates, five of whom were African American, in 2012 general elections to Georgia's Senate and House. In that same year, the PAC supported seventeen women, fourteen of whom were African American, in primary races (2012 Endorsed Candidates). Both North Carolina and Georgia, with the aid of these state PACs, are among the three southern states with over 20 percent of their state legislatures composed of women. In particular, Georgia has made relative progress in African American women's representation in the state's General Assembly with 26 African American women currently legislators (CAWP). National PACs, like EMILY's List, have also had an impact. EMILY's List supports Wendy Davis, the famous Texas state senator, in her current race for governor of Texas. However, given the nature the conservative South, only seven of the forty-two candidates EMILY's List supports are southern politicians (EMILY's).

Not all PACs and women's networks do their jobs well or at all. Ms. Watson revealed a new, non-partisan group meant to encourage women in politics had approached her during her 2002 race for the South Carolina Senate. She was interviewed by the group and was looking forward to their endorsement as the only female candidate in the race. However, they did not endorse her and actually tacitly endorsed her male opponent, citing that they did not want to support the "unlikely candidate." For their part, the organization failed, but the experience stuck with Ms. Watson (Watson). Indeed, a report from the Kennedy School of Government at

Harvard found that in South Carolina organizations that focus on women's political participation tend to actually support male candidates and then garner female support of these candidates, instead of actually encouraging female candidates. This was not found to be unusual in other southern states, such as Alabama and Mississippi, in the same report. Although at least some kind of women's organizations existed in southern states, their level effectiveness compared to states such as Vermont, Maine, and Washington was vastly inadequate (Blagg, King, and Thompson). Even in Ms. Loveday's experience as Executive Director of the South Carolina Democratic Party for three years, not once did a women's organization or PAC support one of her female candidates. "Organizations are very picky with the races they get into," she shared and went on to say, "I worked with Elizabeth Colbert on her campaign [for the U.S. House of Representatives]; she is, of course, a Democrat who has social leanings in line with EMILY'S List. But they did not come out to support her" (Loveday).

The support of PACs can ease one of the issues that tend to concern female politicians – campaign money. The perception exists that women have a more difficult time raising funds for campaigns when compared to men (Money 10). While research has shown that women and men can and do raise similar contributions in comparative races, women must often put forth more effort to raise equal funds, and this is compounded by the finding that equal amounts between male and female candidates often show differential returns (Money 10). Advocates for public financing systems hold that women, particularly women of color, benefit from this system, as it increases the diversity of not only candidates but donors as well. Public financing can alleviate women's concerns about raising money, as well as address the limiting factor that

political parties can play in affecting women's bids for office (Money 17). Ms. Loveday shared her experience with campaign financing and female candidates, saying, "Women don't like pushing people to give them an answer or asking for money. With raising money, you can't just take no for an answer. It's harder for them to rebut with lower amounts, like \$500, until they get a yes when a larger amount, such as \$1,000, is turned down" (Loveday). While there are fourteen states with some form of public financing, only three states – Arizona, Maine, and Connecticut – have enacted full reforms for public financing for state legislative office.<sup>4</sup> Of the eleven southern states considered in this research, only two states – Florida and North Carolina - have enacted any public finance reforms, although neither state extends these reforms to state legislative candidacies (Public). Yet, these two southern states have shown progress in women's representation relative to the other nine states (CAWP). Public finance reform has the possibility to increase women's representation in southern state houses, but it must first become a plausible reform in southern states' House of Representatives and Senates.

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<sup>4</sup> Arizona, Connecticut, and Maine are all among the state legislatures with the highest composition of women according to 2014 statistics from CAWP. Respectively, they rank third, thirteenth, and twelfth for female composition of state assemblies. This could be an issue of substantive representation on the behalf of those female legislators who are familiar with the experiences of campaign funding as women, in addition to a more favorable political environment towards the issue.

## VI. The Question of Incumbency

The structure and circumstances of southern state legislatures present a number of issues to women's candidacies. First, one must consider the issue of incumbency, as "[w]inning has nothing to do with the sex of the candidate, and everything to with incumbency" (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). An incumbent has an obvious advantage in terms of name recognition among his or her constituency, as he or she has already held elective office. In the South, though, it is almost always a "he" who is the incumbent. Common wisdom would hold that when men have the dominant position in political institutions that permit limitless reelections, women are disadvantaged as the challengers (Schwindt-Bayer 229). Term limits have been suggested to force retirements on sitting politicians which would increase the number of open seat contests and, theoretically, improve women's chances as candidates (Ford 164). However, term limits are a recent phenomenon in the United States, and the effects, at least thus far, do not show solid improvement for women's representation in state legislatures (Schwindt-Bayer 231). Three southern states have enacted term limit legislation: Arkansas, Florida, and Louisiana (Term).

In Arkansas, as in Colorado, Maine, and Michigan, the effect of term limits actually decreased women's representation due to more women being forced out of office due to term limits than women who ran in the resulting open seat elections. Florida's proportion of female legislators held steady, showing no increase or decrease as a result of term limits (Carroll and Jenkins 8). Louisiana, the state currently ranked last in the nation for women's representation in the state legislature, showed no change in representation even when it enacted term limits. When Louisiana's twelve-year term

limit, enacted in 1995, reached its year of impact in 2007, the proportion of women in their House and Senate remained constant at 17.4 percent from the year 2006.

Furthermore, since that year, Louisiana has showed almost constant decline in the percentage of female state legislators, reaching 12.5 percent of women in the state House and Senate in 2014 (Term; CAWP). Overall, only three states, California, Ohio, and South Dakota, had gains in women's representation that could be partially due to the enactment of term limits (Carroll and Jenkins 8).

Ironically, as concerns the South particularly, term limits were especially beneficial to strengthening the Republican Party in the South, as more Democratic incumbents were forced to surrender their seats (Woodard 351). As the Republican Party's support grew, this was problematic for southern female candidates, even of the Republican Party. Republican women, perceived as more liberal whether they are in reality or not, tend to fare better in districts that resemble those areas that tend to elect Democratic men, as opposed to solid Republican districts (Ford 168). Ultimately, term limits have had no noticeable, positive effect upon women's representation (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). Term limits are not a panacea to the issue of women's underrepresentation, especially in the southern states. Without encouraging women to become candidates, women will be less likely to run for the seats even as they become open through term limits.

## VII. The Southern Legislature

Whereas incumbency and term limits lead to more questions than answers, the structure of state legislatures across the South is a hindrance to women's opportunity to serve in public office. State legislatures in the South, throughout the majority of history, were the domain of elite citizens and local politicians (Woodard 345). Over time, as legislatures and their responsibilities grew, more of the traditional elite was replaced by working professionals, such as lawyers, accountants, or small business owners, who dedicated part of their time to serving as legislators (Woodard 347). However, state legislatures across the South suffer a lack of professionalization that is an impediment to women's opportunity.

Studies have found that state legislatures may be divided into the three categories of professional, hybrid, and citizen (Woodard 347). More professionalized legislatures include California, Illinois, and New Jersey (Full). These professional legislatures meet almost year round, and the legislators are treated as full-time employees, including in terms of compensation (Woodard 347). For example, California, ranked as the 17<sup>th</sup> best state for female representation, pays state legislators \$90,526 per a year, in addition to per diem allotments. New Jersey and Illinois, ranked tenth and eighth respectively for the proportion of female legislators in their state assembly, paid state lawmakers appropriate, livable salaries for their year-round work (2013 NCSL Legislator Compensation Data; CAWP). At the other end of the legislative spectrum, citizen legislatures meet for shorter sessions and members are not considered full-time employees. Consequently, salaries are extremely low and only supplemental to an alternate stable income (Woodard 347). The state legislatures of

Georgia and Mississippi still exist as citizen legislatures. All other southern state legislatures exist as hybrid legislatures, although Florida shows trends of increasing professionalization (Full). The strong traditional political culture in the South creates an atmosphere in which increasing state is power is met with suspicion, so many state legislatures retain less outward signs of power in the South (Woodard 347). In this way, the South's traditional political culture continues to have direct and indirect effects on women's representation.

Over time, many state legislatures have become increasingly professionalized, which "has the potential to diversity the legislature" (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). In less professionalized legislatures, it is necessary to have a primary job, outside of one's legislative duties, in order to support oneself. Therefore, Sanbonmatsu argues that as legislatures come to have longer sessions and salaries increase, there are "more opportunities for the candidacies of individuals other than the typical white male lawyer" (*Where Women Run*). Granted that most southern state legislatures exist in a hybrid status at best, the institution of the state legislature itself then becomes a prohibitive factor for increasing the representation of both women and minorities. Moreover, Sanbonmatsu found that female legislators, Republican women especially, are "significantly less likely than men to be employed outside the legislature while serving" ("Political Parties"). In the South, the average salary of a state legislator is \$19,246 compared to an average of \$38, 773 for legislators outside of the region (Woodard 345). Most salaries of southern legislators are beneath that average. Mississippi, ranking 39<sup>th</sup> in women's representation, pays state legislators \$10,000 a year plus a small per diem when in session (2013 NCSL Legislator Compensation

Data). Such a low salary only allows for the candidacies of certain type of individuals – those who can “afford” to serve – and is certainly exclusionary for many women, particularly women of color, throughout the South.

Due to inadequate compensation, southern legislators typically have primary careers that they maintain while serving. Few careers can support the absences required by the legislative calendar. For the former Executive Director of the South Carolina Democratic Party, this posed a particular problem. “There are not many people who can dedicate six months out of the year to being in legislature. For example, it is impossible for teachers. It is difficult to find women who have the support system *and* the ability to run” (Loveday). Again and again, the importance of encouraging women to run is emphasized.

Beyond the rules and statutes governing compensation and session lengths, one must consider the design of the districts that send representatives to southern legislatures. In the South, every single last district in all eleven states is a single member district (Grofman, Hill, and Niemi 444). Empirical evidence has shown that women both run and are elected at higher rates in multimember districts (Sanbonmatsu, “Political Parties,” 800). Multimember districts have proven more favorable to women’s representation due to the lack of zero-sum game politics as there is no specific opponent to defeat, voters being more comfortable voting for a woman knowing she is not their only representative, as well as the fact that a woman running in a group may bring forth more publicity which generates votes (Ford 166). While multimember districts may not be used to elect members of the U.S. Congress, states are otherwise constitutionally able to establish any legal election method (Ford 166).

Currently, ten states use multimember districts to elect members of the state legislature. Vermont uses multimember districts to elect both the House and Senate in their state assembly (Schaller). The state ranks second in the nation for the proportion of female representation in their legislature, which currently is composed of 40.6 percent women (CAWP). Beyond just a mild correlation, this positive relationship holds in other states with multimember districts. Arizona, New Jersey, and Washington each elect their respective lower chambers entirely through multimember districts. Maryland uses multimember districts to elect about a third of its state House of Delegates members (Schaller). All four of the before mentioned states are among the top ten states for women's representation in the state legislature (CAWP).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, these four states show that even a mixed system, ones implementing both single member and multimember districts, proves to be a more conducive system for women to run for and win elective office.

Before the 1960s, multimember districts were far more common. In fact, they were used in some way by a majority of states, with approximately half of all state legislators elected through multimember districts (Schaller). However, what benefits women's representation does not benefit other underrepresented minorities. African Americans and Hispanics, particularly in the South, have fought against multimember districts as it is more likely in a single member district electoral mechanism that a minority may dominate in at least a few of the single member districts and win representation. The Supreme Court has even found that some multimember districts have been designed to discriminate against racial or linguistic minorities (Grofman,

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<sup>5</sup> Arizona is ranked third with 34.4 percent women in the state assembly. Washington, with 32.7 percent women, ranks sixth, and New Jersey ranks tenth with 30 percent of women in the state legislature. Women compose 30.3 percent of Maryland's legislature, ranking it eighth in relation to the other states.

Hill, and Niemi 441). The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which created covered jurisdictions that demanded preclearance for any new electoral procedure, and the *Baker v. Carr* decision of “one man, one vote” in 1962 effectively destroyed the viability of multimember districts in the South (Woodard 166, 347). In southern states, with their larger African American populations and history of racism, single member districts were often the result of the courts or the Justice Department in order to guarantee at least one majority-minority district (Grofman, Hill, and Niemi 453). However, while African American and other minorities challenged the electoral system, women never have (Ford 166). Although Grofman, Hill, and Niemi argue that multimember districts do not inherently suppress minorities, but are rather simply used as a tool to that end at times, these districts seem unlikely to reemerge, particularly in the South with its abiding legacy of racial discrimination within the electoral process (Grofman, Hill, and Niemi 454; Schaller).

Majority-minority districts play their own role in women’s underrepresentation in the South. Following the Voting Rights Act of 1965, southern states slowly redrew district lines to avoid violating the new law (Woodard 166). Over time, minorities benefited from the legislation. By the mid-1990s, black Southerners had experienced a boom in representation compared to earlier numbers due to majority-minority districts that became increasingly strong with amendments to the Voting Rights Act and court cases (Woodard 169). In 2009, the state legislatures of Mississippi and Alabama were composed of 29 percent and 25 percent African Americans respectively (Woodard 171). A vast amount of good concerning minority representation has occurred because of affirmative racial gerrymandering in southern states.

However, another unplanned and less pleasing effect also occurred. Either conservative Republicans or liberal black Democrats increasingly dominated southern districts that were once typically represented by white centrist Democrats.<sup>6</sup> As the mid-1990s approached, it was clear that conservative Republicans had made gains at the expense of moderate Democrats. To examine the impact this has on overall women's representation in southern states, one must consider how voters perceive female candidates. Women, both white and of minority races, are perceived as more liberal than their male counterparts (Ford 150). Even Republican women in these increasingly conservative Republican districts face an uphill battle in convincing constituents they are "conservative enough." As many democratic votes are packed into gerrymandered, majority-minority districts, southern African American women may stand to gain *if* they are encouraged to run. Further specific research is needed to determine if majority-minority districts advantages African American males at the expense of African American females. Additionally, there is extremely little research that explores the impact of gerrymandering in the southern states as it concerns overall women's representation. This may be an important avenue of research as the majority of southern states maintain their rankings in the bottom half of states with the highest proportion of female representation. The echoes of the South's history of racism continue to resound into the future, and empirical evidence may find that it is the South's daughters of multiple races and ethnicities who are paying the brunt of the price.

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<sup>6</sup> The party realignment that occurred throughout the South in the period following the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act must also be considered here in all of its broadness. Many once loyal southern Democrats did leave the party, but redistricting also plays a part.

### VIII. Traditional Gender Roles in Local Office

The pipeline theory, discussed earlier, holds that as women enter professions that increase the potential candidate pool, they will enter local level office and eventually proceed on to higher political offices at the state and federal level (Brewer and Lublin 380). Using data from nine southern states, Brewer and Lublin conducted a study specific to southern women's election into local level offices and the potential for their advancement to higher political office. They found that traditional gender roles play an important role in the election of women to specific kinds of local office, with broader consequences.

For a region that has established a reputation for hostility to female candidates, the South elects a number of women to local level positions of certain types. Election results showed that, with the exception of Louisiana, women are extremely likely to hold clerk-ship type office in counties, such as assessor, probate judge, and treasurer. In fact, women populated more than two-thirds of these local offices in five of the nine southern states included in this study (Brewer and Lublin 389).<sup>7</sup> While this is progress, it is rather narrow. Women rarely win more powerful county official positions. Offices with more executive power, as well as that of an attorney or coroner, are not held at the same rate. In none of the nine southern states did the proportion of women in these more powerful positions exceed 20 percent (Brewer and Lublin 389). The lack of women in these "power" positions holds serious implications for women to move up the electoral ladder.

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<sup>7</sup> The nine southern states included in Brewer and Lublin's were Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Alabama and Tennessee, included as southern states throughout this thesis, were excluded.

The difference in the offices local female politicians tend to hold can be explained by the strength of traditional conceptions of gender roles in the South. “Women win few elections to offices that entail leadership, executive responsibility, or are involved with violence in any way” (Brewer and Lublin 385). When elected to local office, southern women are primarily “chosen to carry out process-oriented jobs that have relatively little discretion. Curiously, this tends to hold true even in areas of local government that are typically seen as more feminine issues, such as education. Few women in Mississippi, for example, have ever been elected as superintendent of education, especially prior to 1999. Indeed, Mississippian women in office even today are more likely to be tax assessors or circuit clerks than superintendents (Brewer and Lublin 385). These kinds of offices are both less prestigious and less visible than the local offices mostly controlled by males (Brewer and Lublin 388). With local female politicians serving in offices associated with less executive power and visibility, one may say that the electoral ladder for men and women in the South is very separate and very unequal.

Visibility, as seen in the success of incumbent politicians, is extremely useful to politicians, both male and female of all races. As most women throughout the South are relegated to less visible positions in local office, it makes translating a local position into a state or federal office more difficult. Southern women “either do not seek or do not win powerful leadership roles” (Brewer and Lublin 389).<sup>8</sup> Gender roles are

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<sup>8</sup> An earlier study cited conducted in 1997 in specific counties of Florida and Georgia found that African American women seeking local office, while facing other hurdles unknown to white women, did fare better in terms of being elected by their constituency. Brewer and Lublin theorize that this may be due to the higher level of education found among African American women as a whole compared to African American males. Additionally, sizable percentages of African American men (20 to 30 percent) cannot even vote in many southern states due to felony convictions. (Brewer and Lublin 384)

obviously still relevant. This suggests significant issues with the pipeline theory in southern states particularly. As Brewer and Lublin posit, “[o]ne cannot help but speculate that women will continue to face major barriers in winning election to executive positions...if they are only infrequently elected to even local leadership positions” (391). These findings stress the importance of finding a means to increase recruiting efforts and support available to all women candidates throughout southern states, as even the majority of women who exhibit self-starting candidacies at local levels apparently encounter difficulties with moving upwards into state office. More forces must come together to combat the powerful conservative beliefs and strength of traditional gender roles in the region in order to increase the number of women candidates. As the South looks onward to the future, it cannot leave half of its population behind in order to progress. Change, a four-letter word to many southerners, must come.

## IX. The Future of Women's Representation in the South

The South is capable of change. It slowly changed after the civil rights movement, and the southern electorate certainly underwent change during the period of party realignment. One particular state outside of the region may be a useful example of a substantial increase in women's representation in state politics: New Jersey. While cultural differences do and will likely always persist between this state and southern states as a whole, New Jersey is a state dominated by a highly individualistic political culture (Johnson 497). Individualistic political culture is present in the South, particularly in Florida and Texas, although many states are still dominated by traditionalistic culture (Woodard 7). New Jersey is currently composed of 30 percent women in their state assembly. In 1975, only 7.4 percent of state legislators were women. In particular, since 1990 when New Jersey was in the bottom ten states in the nation for women's representation, the state legislature has almost tripled its percentage of female legislators. The state leapt from the bottom ten in the nation to the top ten within fourteen years (CAWP).

Several changes occurred in New Jersey over time to increase the numbers of women in office: higher professionalization of the state legislature, parties' recruitment of women to run in viable districts, and women's qualifications increased, including a number of women climbing the electoral food chain from local office (McCormick and McCormick 37-38). These issues are familiar, as they were cited as impediments to women seeking political office in the South. However, if New Jersey changed, then southern states can also change. Granted that significant differences between the two states exist, the South may have to change in different ways in order to amplify

women's representation. A historically low number of women in the state House and Senate is not necessarily a predictor of a permanently low rate of women in state office.

The South is, indeed, changing as the twenty-first century proceeds. The eleven southern states have been classified into three separate categories based on economic, political, and social indicators. "National" states are more in step with the states outside the southern region; they have more educated, professionalized work forces and larger, more diverse populations. Virginia, Florida, Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina are all considered national states. "Emergent" states represent a sort of limbo. These states are not quite at an equal footing with national states, yet they are typically more populated and wealthier than the remaining southern states. Emergent states include Alabama, Louisiana, and Tennessee. Finally, "traditional" states retain more of their southern culture, are poorer, and less educated. These states include South Carolina, Mississippi, and Arkansas (Woodard 16-19).

None of the national states fall into the bottom ten rankings of women's representation at the state level (CAWP). For the most part, these states have the highest percentages of non-southern born citizens; they are most definitely more diverse than their other neighboring states. Moreover, these five states all fall into the top five southern states with the highest number of citizens with a four-year college degree (Woodard 17). These aspects of their population have led to a more conducive constituency for women who choose to seek public office. Research has shown that in regions where the electorate has become increasingly racially and ethnically diverse as well as more educated, women's political opportunities will increase (Ford 168). These wealthier states have higher per capita incomes than other southern states. This is

important as Brewer and Lublin found that women fare increasingly well in areas with a higher income (Woodard 17; Brewer and Lublin 384). Moreover, as the population size and its needs have increased, states have, out of necessity, increased the professionalization of their legislatures (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*). As stated earlier, women tend to run and win at greater rates in areas with increasingly professionalized legislative bodies.

Female politicians in southern national states also hold another advantage compared to their counterparts in emergent and traditional states. These states all have large metropolitan areas. Female candidates are more likely to run and win in these urban areas, likely due to the strength of conservative values and gender roles in the rural South (Brewer and Lublin 383). Beyond state elections, this is beneficial to women who may consider seeking national office, as only two or three cities in these national states can decide the outcome of political races (Woodard 18). Atlanta, Georgia, for example, elected Shirley Franklin as mayor in 2001. She was the first African American woman to hold that position in a major southern city (Deckman, Dolan, and Swers 194).

Emergent states do trail these national states, although they are moving towards the development already attained by those states. Each emergent state has growing urban areas (Woodard 19). However, Louisiana – an emergent state – ranks last in the nation for women’s representation (CAWP). Statistics have shown that while Louisiana approaches national status on per capita income and other indicators, it is ranked tenth out of the eleven southern states for non-southern born population and the percentage of the state population with a four-year college degree (Woodard 17). Lack of in-

migration and education may be sufficient to cause Louisiana's current lack of female representation. In addition, Louisiana and Alabama are both "running from behind" in a sense. In 1975, only 1.4 percent of Louisiana's state legislature was female, and in Alabama, a meager 0.7 percent of state legislators were female. In contrast, no national state had below 4.2 percent female legislators in 1975, and North Carolina and Florida actually had percentages of 8.8 and 8.1 respectively (CAWP).

Traditional southern states populate the bottom of the list of rankings of the eleven southern states in terms of income, non-southern born populations, and education (Woodard 17). These factors, in addition to maintaining a strong southern culture and lacking major metropolitan areas, lead them to be among the least friendly of southern states to women's candidacies. Governments in these states do continue to attempt to elevate the status of their states, but no substantial change has been made (Woodard 19). Georgia, Tennessee, and South Carolina, falling into the national, emergent, and traditional categories respectively, portray how the level of "evolvment" of a southern state generally correlates to higher female representation. In 1975, these states had similar proportions of female representation in their state assemblies. By 2014, these percentages now differ rather drastically as seen in Chart A on page 56. However, the evolution of southern states does not automatically lead to more women in government office. The interplay between progress and a state's culture and more qualitative features does occur. For example, Virginia, one of the states where traditionalistic political culture reached its height, ranks fortieth in the nation with only 17.1 percent women in their state legislature (Woodard 7, 19; CAWP). Arkansas has a very similar 17 percent women in the state House and Senate, although it is considered

a traditional state with very low income, education, and outsider population compared to Virginia's top rankings in all three of those categories (Woodard 17; CAWP). Chart B on page 57 demonstrates how multivariate factors beyond development indicators must impact the rate of women's representation in the South. However, in general, as the South experiences growing in-migration populations and increasingly educated citizens, progress in women's representation will likely follow.

For a number of reasons, the South has become an attractive area to those outside the region. By 2010, all southern states had at least 10 percent non-native southerners in their population. Almost half of the southern states actually had over a quarter of the population as non-southerners by 2010.<sup>9</sup> In-migration brings important diversity to a region that sorely lacks it. Many of those who came from the Northeast and Midwest brought their own values and political cultures (Woodard 178-179). Increasing diversity, especially diversity that questions the traditionalistic political culture of the South, is very important for increasing women's representation in the region.<sup>10</sup>

As early as 1965, the South began to experience a reversal of the out-migration of African Americans. Currently, African Americans are now leaving other regions at higher rates to come south (Woodard 172). Consequently, a number of metropolitan areas in the South have sizable African American communities. Atlanta, Georgia, as of 2010, had a substantial African American population of 32 percent, and Memphis,

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<sup>9</sup> In 2010, five of the eleven southern states had at least 25 percent of their populations as non-native to the region. Those states were Florida (51.71%), Georgia (26.11%), North Carolina (26.86%), Texas (30.4%), and Virginia (31.82%).

<sup>10</sup> New populations may also conform into the South's traditional political culture. There are no available statistics that cover the rate at which non-southerners who migrate to the South either keep their existing political beliefs, acting as agents of change in the region, or conform to the South's more typical political beliefs. Observation shows that some conform and some continue to advocate their own beliefs.

Tennessee's population was 46 percent African American. Participation of African American voters has already shown it can change southern politics with the election of Barack Obama in both 2008 and 2012 (Woodard 173). As suspected by Brewer and Lublin, as the proportion of African American voters increases, this may have a positive effect on the election of women, especially African American women in the South (384). Another growing minority population in the South is Hispanics, who make up about 16 percent of the regional population. By state, the Hispanic population ranges from a low of 3 percent in Mississippi to a high of 38 percent in Texas. As the population grows, the Hispanic vote, although unlikely to be a uniform bloc due to diversity within the group itself, will become increasingly important (Woodard 175). Latina women have great potential, but they face many Hispanic cultural influences that place a preference on female presence in the private sphere of home and family (Ford 107). Role models may potentially yield cracks in the power of separate sphere for Latina women particularly, in addition to women in general. Currently, though, of the 1,787 women in state legislatures across the fifty states, 88 are Latinas. Only 11 of those 88 are serving in a southern legislature (Latinas in Elective Office). Illeana Ros-Lehtinen, representing district 27 in south Florida since 1989, remains the single Latina woman in Congress who represents a southern state (Latinas in Elective Office). In the absence of role models, women of color are not as likely to seek involvement in electoral politics even as voters, let alone candidates (Ford 107). More Latina candidates are necessary in the South, especially as the population continues to grow within the region.

This goes back a central theme: more female candidates are needed in the South to increase women's representation. One suggestion to encourage women is to increase the reach of successful PACs, like EMILY's List and WISH List, to include state affiliates that focus on finding and supporting female candidates running for state office (Brewer and Lublin 394). This would increase the number of eligible candidates who could run for higher office. Annie's List in Texas, Lillian's List in North Carolina, and WIN-Pac in Georgia are examples of much-needed state PACs (Women's). However, similar organizations are needed in states that populate the bottom of the list of southern states in terms of women's representation.

If women received more encouragement and support from organizations like these, more candidacies may result. The fact is that the gender gap in political ambition remains (Ford 145). The South, known for its traditional values and mores, retains a strong sense of traditional gender roles that are instilled in young women growing up in southern states throughout their childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Traditional gender socialization remains a hurdle in encouraging women to see themselves as candidates (Ford 146-147). The prevalence of "good old boys' network" and heavily male party structure means that access to political knowledge and power is not distributed evenly in the South (Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run*; Ford 96). Even males outside of those networks tend to see themselves as more informed than women; this holds true among college educated men and women (Ford 97). In an original survey distributed to male and female political science majors or minors at the University of South Carolina, 75 percent of respondents replied "False" to the statement: "Women are as likely to win political office as men." Even among students

within the discipline of political science, the perception is so strong that the statistical truth that women win at equal rates as men, even in the South, is somehow overlooked. Of the 112 students surveyed, two even denied that it is important for women to serve in elected office. Incidentally, they were both females who identified themselves as rather conservative Republicans. Graphs 1 and 2 on pages 58 and 59 reflect these results (Leaphart).

In order to challenge this perception, young women in the South must be exposed to images and other media of female politicians. Ann Richards, former governor of Texas, expressed that other than policy work, the most significant thing she could do was for “her picture to appear in textbooks and offer a role model for girls to emulate” (Ford 99). Traditional gender socialization in the South is only reinforced in girls’ school textbooks when “males [are] depicted as the primary figures in political life, while females are rarely mentioned” (Ford 99). There is a positive relationship with the media making female politicians more visible and young women expressing more political interest or ambition (Ford 144). Although the number is smaller, there still are female politicians for young women to learn from in the South. In South Carolina, for example, Gilda Cobb-Hunter is an African American representative in the state House who is also a National Committeewoman for the Democratic National Committee (Representative). In the S.C. Senate and on the other side of the aisle, there is Katrina Shealy who is currently the sole woman in that body. She defeated Sen. Jake Knotts as a petition candidate – a feat that required her constant work and dedication. With the unprecedented backing of the state Republican Party as a petition candidate, Sen. Shealy had to go door to door in her district in order to obtain the 4,000 necessary

signatures she needed. When she won the office, she actually framed one of the pairs of tennis shoes she wore out in the campaigning process (Shealy). Her example of tenacity and courage through adversity as a political candidate is exactly what young southern women need publicized. The real hope of increasing women's representation in the South is in the women who have the courage to run and to lead. Most of all women in the South need to encourage each other and to open their eyes and see that women do run and do win. That is how female representation will ultimately change in the region.

## X. Conclusion

Southern women undoubtedly face difficulties in achieving elected office that are rather peculiar to the region. Depending on the woman's background and ethnicity, these difficulties can be amplified. As the South enters the modern age at long last and its states begin to develop economically and experience in-migration, it is hopeful that women stand to gain by this increasing diversity and wealth in the "new southern electorate." Young women in the South, though, must be exposed to role models in order to alter deeply embedded perceptions regarding women's electability and place, or lack thereof, in politics. The South's abiding conservatism and patriarchal society has created a society that does not easily allow women to walk into its state legislatures and executive offices. Even at the local level, southern women have experienced difficulty in winning positions that exercise true executive power.

The lack of recruitment resources for women in the region exacerbates the conservative climate regarding women and politics. More southern states sorely need state-affiliated PACs and women's networks to encourage and support women's races at the state level. In addition, political parties must consciously look beyond the ubiquitous "good old boys network" in order to find viable female candidates for office. Structural inhibitors also continue to exist. Hybrid and citizen legislatures only allow for a narrow field of candidates who already have the time and money to serve; whole segments of women cannot serve in the state legislature, even if they desire to run. Single member districts and the level of zero-sum game politics required to run and win these districts are not as conducive as multimember districts to women's candidacies.

Moreover, gerrymandered majority-minority districts also pose their own problems for women politicians.

As the South develops, one may hope that women's representation in the region develops with it. Results of increasing development, such as more diverse and educated populations, can be factors in increasing women's representation in southern states.

Young southern women must be encouraged to seek out role models in politics.

Slowly, the South has provided its young women with some examples of tenacious and capable female leaders of varying races and ethnicities. Nancy Astor, a native Virginian herself who later became the first female Member of British Parliament, proclaimed after she won her seat, "When I came in, I left the door wide open!" (Ford 442). That is still the duty of female politicians in the South today – to leave the door open and to ask their sisters to join them.

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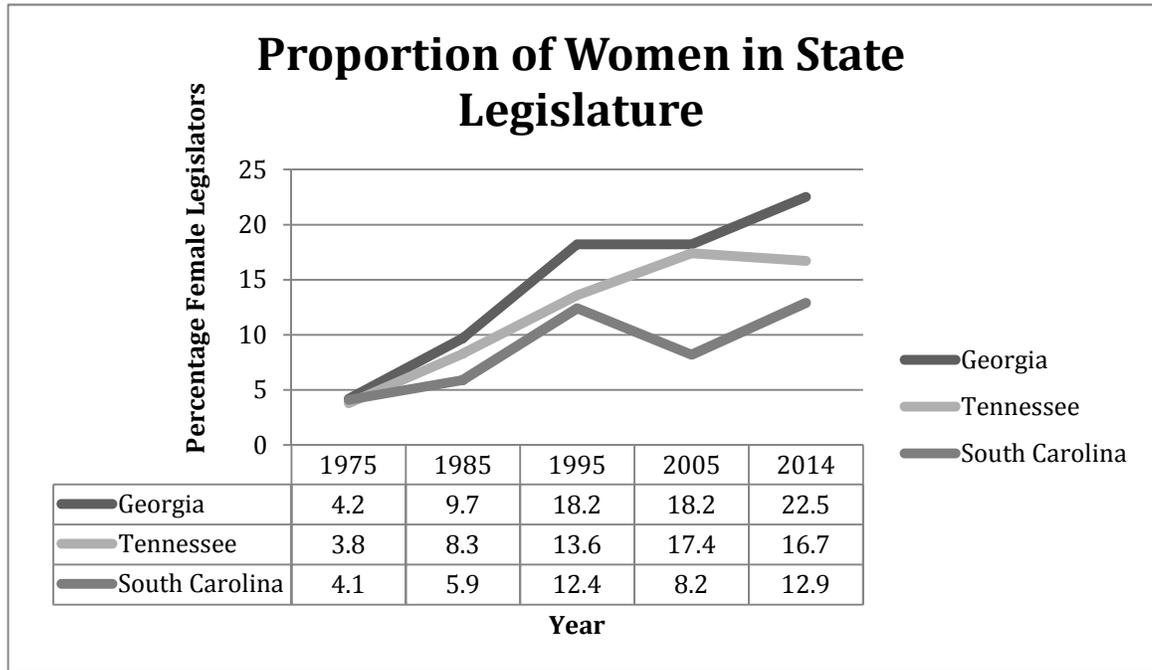
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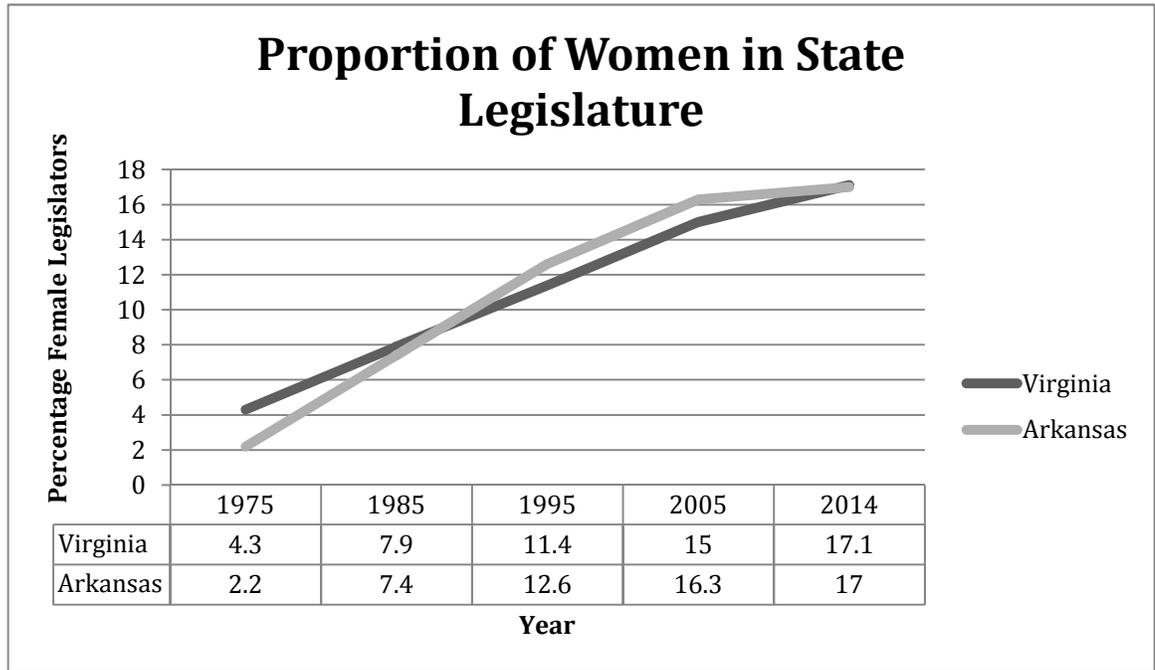
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Chart A



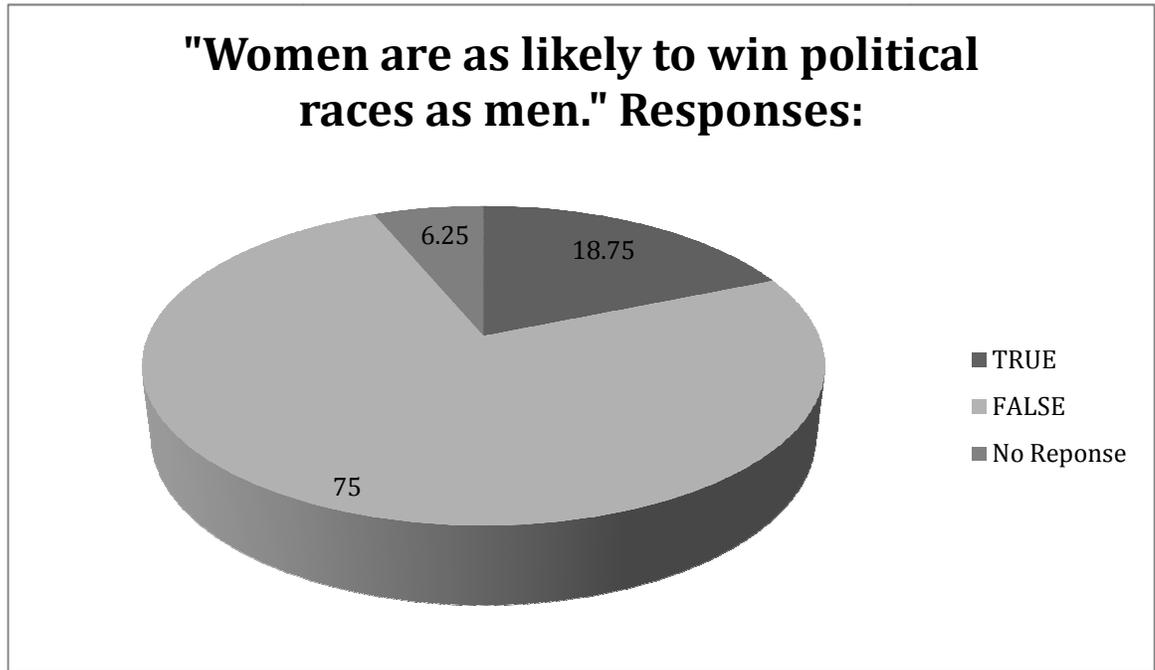
Data from the Center for American Women and Politics

Chart B



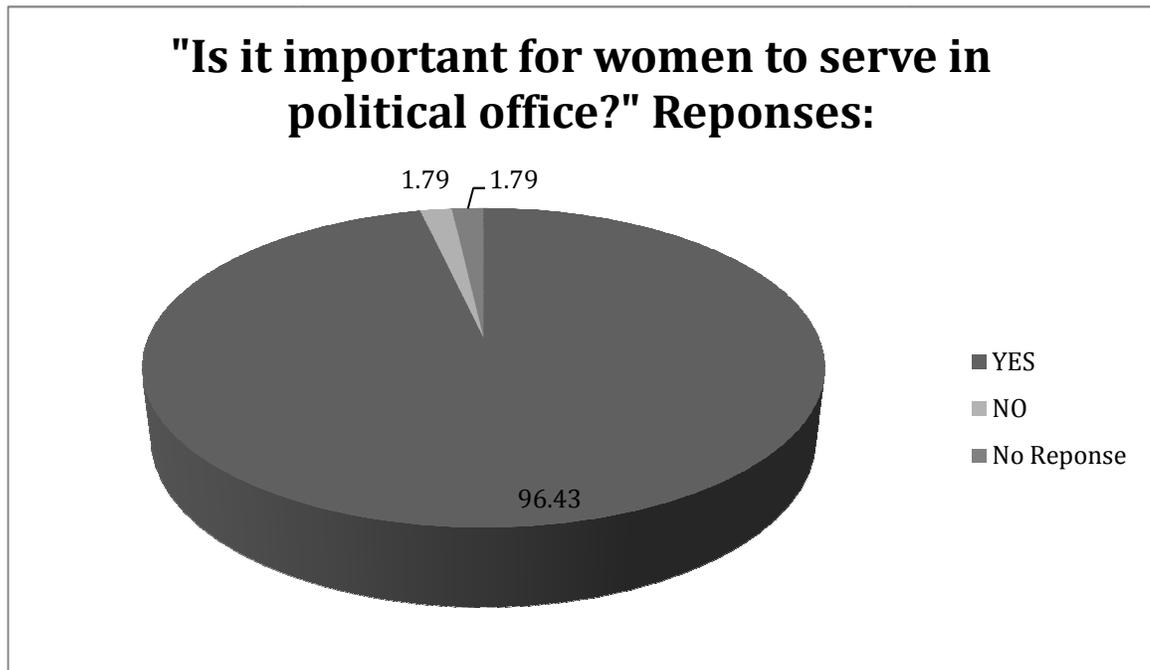
Data from Center for American Women and Politics

Graph 1



Data from original survey, "Women and Politics in the American South"

Graph 2



Data from original survey, "Women and Politics in the American South"