
*SUBSTANTIVE IMPACT
OF THE CHANGING FACE
OF ELECTED OFFICIALS*

Agenda Setting and African American
Women in State Legislatures

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SUMMARY. Political scientists have, in recent years, uncovered substantial evidence that political representation in the United States is influenced by gender and race, yet generally examine the effects of gender entirely separate from the effects of race. In this article, we explore the agenda-setting behavior of African American female state legislators. We find that African American women *do* respond to both women's interests and black interests. We also find that while the sponsorship of black interest measures by African American women (or other legislators) is not influenced by the proportion of African Americans within the chamber,

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African American women are less likely to sponsor women's interest measures in legislatures with a relatively high proportion of women present. We conclude that because of their focus on multiple groups, black women occupy a unique place in representation, and that their choices are influenced by the institutional context in which they work. doi:10.1300/J501v28n03_04 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Political scientists have, in recent years, uncovered substantial evidence that gender and race influence political representation in the United States.¹ Scholars have shown that women elected to public office are generally more likely than men to focus on interests particularly relevant to women; likewise, African American legislators are generally more likely to focus on interests particularly relevant to African Americans (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Canon 1999; Haynie 2001; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002; Thomas 1994; Wolbrecht 2000). Yet, to date, little research has examined whether and how the intersection of race and gender influences legislative behavior. When studying race, gender, and representation, political scientists have often assumed that there are no gender differences among black representatives, and no racial differences among female representatives. Indeed, attention has often been paid only to what factors influence the representation of women or to what factors influence the representation of African Americans.

Such approaches are hardly surprising given how recently U.S. legislatures have become more diverse; it has only been in the past three decades that women and African Americans have been elected to state office in substantial numbers. State legislatures have been a natural focus for the study of race, gender, and representation, given that they have a relatively high degree of diversity, and that there is substantial variance across states in institutional context. However, it has only been since the early 1990s that multi-state studies of the role of gender and race in political representation have become relatively common, and, with few exceptions,

the study of gender and representation has proceeded on a separate track from the study of race and representation. Such single-axis approaches (Crenshaw 1998) to the study of representation are clearly overly simplistic; as Hawkesworth (2003) notes, representation is not only raced, and not only gendered, but “raced-gendered.”

In this article, we address the intersection of race and gender by focusing on the behavior of African American women serving in state legislatures. We explore two questions. First, we examine whether African American women demonstrate policy interests that are distinct. African American women may be more active or more likely than other legislators to focus their efforts on policies that relate to the intersection of gender and race. Second, we explore whether institutional factors, such as the percentage of women and African American legislators within a chamber, influence the legislative behavior of African American women.

RACE, GENDER, AND POLICY INTERESTS

While most studies of diversity and representation do adopt the single-axis approach described above, there are exceptions. Some of the research on race, gender, and representation examines whether racial identification or consciousness enhances or conflicts with gender identification or consciousness. Prestage (1977) notes that African American women face a double disadvantage that has important implications for their legislative behavior and success. In addition to recognizing African American women’s “double minority status” (1977, 415), Prestage’s study reveals a significant amount of ambivalence toward the women’s liberation movement among these women. This leads to the question whether the multiple identifications of African American women conflict with each other or enhance each other. As Darcy and Hadley (1988) note, one possibility is that African American women prioritize one identification over the other. Some authors argue that racism is or should be the primary concern of black women; others argue that sexism is an equal or greater obstacle to equality. Alternatively, it is possible that racial identification or consciousness may enhance gender identification or consciousness—and vice versa. Indeed, Simien (2005) has found some evidence that this is the case in the mass public.

What little research exists on state legislative behavior suggests that African American women do respond to both women’s interests and black interests, and in that manner occupy a unique place in representation. In a survey designed to examine the experiences and policy priorities of

African American state legislators, Barrett (1995) finds that African American women are similar in their policy interests to both African American legislators and female legislators, all of whom tend to name education and health care reform, unemployment, and economic development as top issues. African American women are relatively united in their policy interests, and name more policy priorities than either black men or white women. In further studies, Barrett (1997) finds that African American women are different from their colleagues in that they are more likely to perceive both groups of legislators—blacks and women—as having something important and unique to contribute to representation. African American men, on the other hand, are more likely to perceive racial gaps as more important than gender gaps, and white women are more likely to perceive gender gaps as more important than racial gaps.

In this article, we build on this literature by examining whether African American female legislators bring to the agenda a set of issues that is distinct from that of African American men or non-black women. Agenda setting is a crucial point in any policy-making endeavor (Bachrach and Baratz 1963; Cobb and Elder 1983; Kingdon 1989), and can affect policy preferences and outcomes by defining the set of alternatives. Moreover, the agenda-setting stage of the process represents a point at which representatives likely have an opportunity to address group interests in a way that is compatible with other influences on their behavior, such as district composition and partisanship. We choose in this article to focus on agenda-setting in the form of bill sponsorship because it is the stage of the legislative process at which gender and racial differences are most likely to emerge.² Scholars have noted that bill sponsorship serves as an excellent measure of commitment to an issue (e.g., Canon 1999; Haynie 2001; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002).

In one of the few studies that examine the sponsorship behavior of African American women, Bratton and Haynie (1999) find that African American women are somewhat less likely than African American men to focus on black interests, and somewhat less likely than white women to focus on women's interests. One possible explanation for this, given the unique place African American women occupy in politics, is that African American women are more likely than other legislators to focus on legislation addressing the interests of African Americans *or* women, even if they introduce somewhat fewer measures in any particular category. We explore that possibility in this paper. We also explore whether African American women introduce more measures in policy areas that may not explicitly involve race or gender, but that hold particular relevance for both groups, such as measures addressing poverty.

RACE, GENDER, AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

We also examine the possibility that African American women are particularly influenced in their agenda-setting choices by contextual factors such as the presence of other women and other African Americans within the chamber. In the extant research on gender and representation, several scholars have examined the effect that institutional context has in shaping representation. One of the most often named contextual factors that may influence legislative behavior of women is the gender diversity of the chamber. In a study of an anonymous corporation, Kanter (1977) argues that in contexts in which there were few women, gender differences are highlighted and exaggerated by the majority (men), and women are treated as representatives of their category (“tokens”) rather than as individuals. Kanter argues that in response, it is likely that women in these contexts attempt to downplay gender differences and blend into the background. Political scientists drew upon this research to argue that gender differences would be more pronounced in relatively diverse legislatures, or as the number of female legislators approaches a “critical mass” (e.g., Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1994).

Yet as Cammisa and Reingold (2004) note, critical mass theory presents a challenge for researchers for several reasons. First, the theory can be used to predict two conflicting outcomes; women serving as tokens may downplay gender differences or—as Kanter (1993) later acknowledges—some women might respond to token status by capitalizing on their greater visibility. As Bratton (2005) notes, this response might be particularly likely among female politicians. We know that female legislators quite often see themselves as representing women (Reingold 1992) and are more likely to report being proud of accomplishments relating to bills dealing with women (Thomas 1994); they are, in this respect, much different than the corporate employees described in Kanter’s work. Having so few other women present, female legislators may have added incentive to act on behalf of women’s interests, either because they believe no one else will, or because they see a good opportunity to make their mark (Swers 2002). Indeed, given that female legislators may be seen as voters as better able to handle traditional women’s interests (Dolan 2004), women may have an electoral incentive to focus on those interests regardless of the presence of other women. Moreover, as the number of women grows, women may begin to influence men, and gender differences may actually narrow (Bratton 2005; Bratton and Ray 2002). Bratton (2005) finds that women who serve in very male-dominated legislatures are just as likely as—in some cases, more likely than—those

who serve in more gender diverse legislature to be relatively active in placing gender issues on the policy agenda.

The critical mass literature has tended to focus on sex differences in representation, but the theory can be applied to racial differences as well. Yet very little research examines whether—and how—African American legislators respond to changes in racial diversity within a chamber. Bratton (2002) finds that as the number of African Americans in a legislative chamber increases, individual legislators introduce fewer black interest measures, although the total number of black interest measures in a chamber stays roughly constant. Changes in gender diversity have little effect on the behavior of individual women, and, indeed, the overall number of women's interest measures increases consistently with the growth in the number of women in the legislature.

African American women may be particularly likely to respond to gender and racial diversity within the institution, since they have multiple under-represented constituencies that require their attention. Agenda setting entails opportunity costs (Schiller 1995). Therefore, as the number of women or African Americans grows, and there are more representatives to share the role of putting group interests on the agenda, African American women may focus less on the relatively well-represented group, and more on the less represented group. Virtually no research examines how African American women react to changes in legislative gender and racial diversity. In this article, we examine whether either gender diversity or racial diversity changes the sponsorship behavior of African American women.

Hypotheses

Based on prior research that demonstrates clear racial and gender differences in sponsorship choices, we make the following two hypotheses:

- H1. African American women will sponsor more legislation focusing on African American interests than will non-black legislators.
- H2. African American women will sponsor more legislation focusing on women's interests than will male legislators.

An additional question is whether African American women make trade-offs in sponsoring legislation. As noted earlier, Bratton and Haynie's (1999) study shows that African American women sponsor fewer women's interest measures than white women (but significantly more such measures than men), and fewer black interest measures than black men (but

significantly more such measures than white legislators). Although Bratton and Haynie did not outline theoretical expectations that would lead to that finding, it is possible, given the opportunity costs involved in sponsorship (Schiller 1995) that African American women do introduce fewer measures in each category, but more group interest measures overall.

There is good reason, however, to expect that any such reduction in activity in sponsoring group interest measures does not mean that African American women choose to represent one group rather than another. In her study, Barrett (1997) finds clear evidence that African American women were not making marked trade-offs; indeed, they were more likely to name a higher number of priorities than other legislators, suggesting that they approach their unique status by addressing a wider array of policy interests than other legislators. Simien's (2005) finding that racial identification of African American women in the mass public enhances gender identification parallels this idea that the representation of women and of minorities is hardly mutually exclusive. Therefore, it is possible that African American women are somewhat less active than non-black women in introducing women's interest measures, and somewhat less active than black men in introducing black interest measures. They may be more active than all other legislators in covering both categories, and more active in sponsorship in general. Given this prior literature, we make the following hypotheses:

- H3. African American women will sponsor fewer women's interest measures than non-black women, and fewer black interest measures than black men.
- H4. African American women will be more likely than other legislators to sponsor at least one measure that focuses on black interests and at least one measure that focuses on women's interests.
- H5. African American women will sponsor a higher total number of measures that focus on either black interests and/or on women's interests than other legislators.

It is also likely that African American women pay particular attention to issues that capture the intersection of race and gender. One such issue is welfare policy; both African Americans and women are disproportionately likely to suffer from poverty and lack of economic opportunities. Therefore, we make the following hypothesis:

- H6. African American women will sponsor more legislation that addresses poverty than other legislators.

Because African American women may be responding to more constituencies than other legislators, it is possible that they are more active in sponsoring legislation than other legislators. Drawing on Barrett's (1997) finding that black women identify more legislative priorities than do other legislators, and Tate's (2003) finding that black women are very active in initiating legislation, we also expect that

- H7. African American women will introduce more measures than other legislators.

Finally, as previously outlined, we expect that African American women will respond to legislative diversity in the following ways:

- H8. African American women will sponsor fewer black interest measures in legislatures with a relatively high degree of racial diversity.
H9. African American women will sponsor fewer women's interest measures in legislatures with a relatively high degree of gender diversity.

DATA AND METHODS

In this article, we used an original dataset of information about the members of the lower chambers of ten state legislatures (Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Texas) and the bills they introduced in 2001. Only legislators that served the full year were included; legislators that either left mid-year or filled vacancies mid-year were omitted from the analysis. States were chosen to provide variance in gender diversity, racial diversity, the relationship between gender and racial diversity, as well as partisan control of the legislature. Table 1 presents descriptive information on the states. State houses with relatively few African Americans are Colorado, New Jersey, and Texas; state houses with a relatively high number of African Americans are Maryland, Michigan, and Mississippi. State houses with relatively few women are Arkansas, Mississippi, and New Jersey; state houses with a relatively high number of women are Colorado, Illinois, and Maryland.

The focus of this study is women's interest legislation, black interest legislation, and legislation addressing poverty. Toward this end, each bill introduced in the lower house of these legislatures was coded according to its substantive content. We matched legislators with their

TABLE 1. Descriptive Information, Legislators and State Houses

| State | Women (%) | | | African Americans (%) | |
|----------------|-----------|-------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| | Democrats | Republicans | All Representatives | Democrats | All Representatives |
| Arkansas | 14 | 14 | 14 | 17 | 12 |
| Colorado | 63 | 29 | 43 | 74 | 3 |
| Florida | 40 | 18 | 26 | 35 | 13 |
| Illinois | 31 | 27 | 29 | 26 | 13 |
| Maryland | 35 | 29 | 36 | 24 | 19 |
| Michigan | 27 | 21 | 24 | 35 | 16 |
| Mississippi | 14 | 12 | 13 | 41 | 28 |
| New Jersey | 23 | 14 | 19 | 25 | 5 |
| North Carolina | 22 | 22 | 22 | 27 | 14 |
| Texas | 21 | 19 | 20 | 18 | 9 |

proposals by examining introducer lists found in the various state legislative documents. When a distinction was made between primary and secondary sponsors, only primary sponsors were included (though bills could have multiple primary sponsors). Information was also gathered for each legislator, including her or his seniority, partisanship, race, gender, committee membership, and leadership position. Various state legislative documents and newspaper searches provided demographic and political information regarding the legislators.

As Bratton (2005) and Reingold (2000) note, political scientists have defined women's interest legislation in a variety of ways (see, for instance, Bratton 2002; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002; Thomas 1994; Wolbrecht 2000). All recognize as "women's issues" a core set of issues that directly and almost exclusively affect women. However, some scholars include in their definition of "women's issues" a broader set of issues with which women have traditionally been associated, such as welfare, education, and health; others focus on such issues as categories for analysis separate from the analysis of women's issues. Some scholars merge what are seen as traditional concerns of women with feminist concerns. Most but not all scholars include measures or policies that are designed to protect multiple groups (including women) from discrimination. The definition of women's issues used in this article captures the core definition reflected in these overall approaches; women's interest legislation includes bills that directly

address and seek to improve women's economic, political, and social status. Some specific examples are: an equal pay act, a bill that provides or regulates day care services, a bill that requires insurance coverage of mammograms, and a bill establishing affirmative action programs for women. Thus women's interest legislation was coded from a feminist perspective. It should be noted that measures placed in broader categories such as "education" or "health" were not included in the definition of women's interests, unless these measures directly focused on issues that are particularly relevant to women.

We defined black interest legislation in a similar manner, as legislation that would decrease discrimination or counter the effects of such discrimination, or improve the political, social, and economic status of African Americans. These measures included affirmative action legislation; legislation designed to protect civil rights (including the rights of the accused and voting rights); and legislation pertaining to the specific health needs of African Americans (such as measures addressing the health needs of elderly African Americans or measures providing funding for research on sickle cell anemia).

Agenda Setting

For each hypothesis, the unit of analysis was the legislator, and the dependent variable was the number of bills introduced in a particular category by that legislator. We attempted to explain the variation in the following six dependent variables:

1. Total number of bills introduced that are black interest measures
2. Total number of bills introduced that are women's interest measures
3. Whether the legislator introduced at least one women's interest measure and at least one black interest measure
4. Total number of bills introduced that address either black interests or women's interests, or both simultaneously
5. Total number of bills introduced that seek to alleviate poverty
6. Total number of bills introduced

Table 2 outlines the association between the dependent variables and the hypotheses. All models, with one exception, are analyzed using negative binomial regression, the appropriate method for event count data.³ For the analysis of the third dependent variable, which is dichotomous rather than a count, we employ logistic regression. Multivariate analysis

TABLE 2. Hypotheses and Dependent Variables

| Hypotheses | Dependent Variables |
|---|--|
| H1. African American women will sponsor more legislation focusing on African American interests than will non-black legislators. | Number of black interest measures introduced. |
| H2. African American women will sponsor more legislation focusing on women's interests than will male legislators. | Number of women's interest measures introduced. |
| H3. African American women will sponsor fewer women's interest measures than non-black women, and fewer black interest measures than black men. | Number of women's interest measures introduced; number of black interest measures introduced. |
| H4. African American women will be more likely than other legislators to sponsor at least one measure that focuses on black interests and at least one measure that focuses on women's interests. | Dummy variable measured 1 if legislator sponsored at least one measure that focused on black interests and at least one measure that focused on women's interests. |
| H5. African American women will sponsor a higher total number of measures that focus on black interests and/or on women's interests than other legislators. | Total number of group interest measures introduced. |
| H6. African American women will sponsor more legislation that addresses poverty than other legislators. | Total number of welfare policy measures introduced |
| H7. African American women will introduce more measures than other legislators. | Total number of measures introduced. |
| H8. African American women will sponsor fewer black interest measures in legislatures with a relatively high degree of racial diversity. | Total number of black interest measures introduced. |
| H9. African American women will sponsor fewer women's interest measures in legislatures with a relatively high degree of gender diversity. | Total number of women's interest measures introduced. |

is an appropriate approach for these analyses, for two reasons. First, when measuring the effect of the race and/or sex of the legislator on behavior, it is important to control for constituency factors (such as racial composition of the district) that would encourage legislators to focus on particular policy areas. Second, it is important to control for state effects, as the norms for sponsorship activity vary widely across states.

Our primary independent variables, the sex and race of the legislators, are measured by three dummy variables: one coded 1 if the legislator is an African American woman (and 0 otherwise); one coded 1 if the legislator is an African American man (and 0 otherwise); and one coded 1 if the legislator is a non-black woman (and 0 otherwise). That is, the omitted reference category in each analysis is non-black men. We included

partisanship as an independent variable, given that prior studies have shown important partisan differences in the sponsorship of black interests and women's interests (Bratton 2002; Swers 2002). Several other likely influences on legislative behavior were included in each model. District demographics are a powerful influence on the likelihood that group interest measures will be introduced (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Grose 2005; Welch 1985), and therefore we included as independent variables the average income in the district and the percentage black in the district. These variables were collected from the *Almanac of State Legislatures* (Lilley, DeFranco, and Diefenderfer 1994). Several scholars have shown that committee membership influences legislative agenda setting (e.g., Bratton and Haynie 1999; Swers 2002), and thus we included in each analysis a dummy variable measuring membership on a relevant committee. "Relevant committee" was measured as an education, health, welfare, or children's policy standing committee. Swers (2002) argues that chairing such a committee might be particularly important as a predictor of the sponsorship of women's interests, and thus we included a variable coded 1 if the legislator was the chair of a relevant committee (and 0 otherwise). We included several control variables in each model: membership within the majority party; whether a legislator held a leadership position (as a speaker, party leader, or committee chair); seniority; the electoral margin from the last race; and the total number of bills introduced.⁴

In all analyses, dummy variables were included to control for fixed state effects. Table 3 presents the descriptive information on the variables used in this study.

The Contextual Effects of Legislative Diversity

To test the seventh and eighth hypotheses regarding the influence of legislative diversity on the agenda-setting behavior of African American women, we built on these basic agenda-setting models. Because our primary interest is in the legislative behavior of African American women, we restricted our first analysis to African Americans, and compared the sponsorship of black interest measures by African American women to the sponsorship activity of the group most likely to sponsor black interest measures as well: African American men. Likewise, in a second analysis, we restricted our focus on women, and compared the sponsorship of women's interest measures by African American women to the sponsorship activity of the group also most likely to sponsor women's interest measures: non-black women.

TABLE 3. Descriptive Information, Variables

| Variable | Means (Standard Deviations) | Ranges |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------|
| African American Female Legislator | .044 (.206) | 0-1 |
| African American Male Legislator | .098 (.297) | 0-1 |
| Non-Black Female Legislator | .191 (.393) | 0-1 |
| Non-Black Male Legislator | .666 (.472) | 0-1 |
| Republican Legislator | .448 (.497) | 0-1 |
| Percent Black in District | 18.06 (21.57) | 0-93 |
| Average Income (in thousands) | 37.31 (13.56) | 5.46-111.56 |
| Membership on Relevant Committee (Education, Health, Welfare, or Children's Committee) | .477 (.500) | 0-1 |
| Chair of Relevant Committee (Education, Health, Welfare, or Children's Committee) | .064 (.245) | 0-1 |
| Affiliated with Majority Party | .608 (.486) | 0-1 |
| Serves in Leadership Position (Speaker, Floor Leader, Committee Chair) | .271 (.445) | 0-1 |
| Total Number of Bills Introduced | 17.28 (18.99) | 1-144 |
| Number of Black Interest Bills Introduced | .34 (.98) | 0-11 |
| Number of Women's Interest Bills Introduced | .70 (1.43) | 0-16 |
| Number of Welfare Policy Measures Introduced | .82 (1.75) | 0-22 |

These two institutional models also included the independent variables from the first set of agenda-setting models described above. In addition, we include two interaction variables in each model. For the model predicting the number of black interest measures sponsored, we included an interaction variable that is coded 1 if the legislator is an African American woman serving in a state house that includes relatively few African American members (Colorado, New Jersey, and Texas), as well as an interaction variable that is coded 1 if the legislator is an African American woman serving in a relatively racially diverse state house (Florida, Michigan, and Mississippi). For the model predicting the number of women's interest measures sponsored, we included an interaction variable that is coded 1 if the legislator is an African American woman serving in a state house with relatively few women (Arkansas, Mississippi, and New Jersey), as well as an interaction variable that is coded 1 if the legislator is an African American woman serving in a relatively gender-diverse state house (Colorado, Illinois, and Maryland).

The estimates for these variables allowed us to assess whether African American women change their sponsorship behavior depending on the racial and gender diversity within the legislature. By disaggregating racial and gender diversity into separate “high” and “low” variables, we acknowledge the seemingly contradictory logic of critical mass theory and allow for the possibility that *both* conditions (in comparison to “medium” or average levels of diversity) may inhibit gender or racially distinct behavior. All control variables present in the original agenda-setting models are included here. We also present, for comparison purposes, equivalent analyses of non-black legislators and of male legislators.

**RESULTS:
AGENDA SETTING
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN**

The results for the first set of agenda-setting analyses are presented in Table 4.

Recall that the first two hypotheses are that African American women will be more likely to focus on black interests and on women’s interests, respectively, than will male legislators and non-black legislators, respectively. The first hypothesis is clearly supported; both black male and black female legislators introduce a relatively high number of black interest measures. The results provide some moderate support for the second hypothesis; black female legislators introduce more women’s interest measures than do men. The parameter estimate for a black female legislator falls just short of statistical significance; the parameter estimate for a non-black female *is*, however, statistically significant. Also, although black women introduce fewer women’s interest measures than non-black women, the difference is not statistically significant. The third hypothesis—that African American women will sponsor fewer black interest measures than black men, and fewer women’s interest measures than non-black women—is not generally supported. African American women sponsor more (but not significantly more) black interest measures than do African American men, and fewer (but not significantly fewer) women’s interest measures than do non-black women. Thus it appears that African American women pay a relatively high degree of attention to both black interests (compared to non-black legislators) and women’s interests (compared to male legislators).⁵

Underscoring this finding is the support we find for our fourth and fifth hypotheses. Recall that the fourth hypothesis is that African American

TABLE 4. Regression Analyses of Number of Bills Sponsored (Standard Errors in Parentheses)^a

| | # Black Interest Measures Introduced ^b | # Women's Interest Measures Introduced ^b | Legislator Introduces at Least One Women's Interest and One Black Interest Measure ^c | Total # Group Interest Measures Introduced ^b | # of Poverty Measures Introduced ^b | Total # Measures Introduced ^b |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|
| Intercept | -3.942** (.623) | -1.842** (.400) | -5.398** (.990) | -1.819** (.351) | -1.084** (.395) | 1.530** (.155) |
| African American Female Legislator | .742* (.364) | .450 (.301) | 1.758** (.589) | .624** (.250) | .521 (.287) | -.272* (.130) |
| African American Male Legislator | .523* (.312) | -.101 (.269) | .790 (.536) | .371* (.215) | .290 (.255) | -.280* (.109) |
| White Female Legislator | -.013 (.211) | .774** (.119) | .339 (.332) | .533** (.109) | .427** (.119) | -.045 (.051) |
| Republican | -.711* (.194) | -.110 (.120) | -.564* (.314) | -.269* (.106) | -.458** (.115) | -.042 (.047) |
| Percentage Black in District | .014** (.006) | .006 (.005) | .016 (.010) | .007* (.004) | -.001 (.004) | .001 (.002) |
| Average Income in District ^d | .014* (.008) | .011** (.004) | .014 (.012) | .012** (.004) | -.008* (.005) | .001 (.002) |
| Membership on Relevant Committee ^e | .028 (.160) | -.109 (.113) | .101 (.268) | -.047 (.097) | .325** (.106) | -.027 (.043) |
| Chair of Relevant Committee ^e | -.183 (.293) | .705** (.187) | .651 (.449) | .507** (.167) | .436** (.175) | .171** (.084) |
| Affiliation in Majority Party | -.184 (.179) | -.038 (.117) | -.397 (.292) | -.117 (.102) | .153 (.113) | .213** (.045) |

TABLE 4. (continued)

| | # Black Interest Measures Introduced ^b | # Women's Interest Measures Introduced ^b | Legislator Introduces at Least One Woman's Interest and One Black Interest Measure ^c | Total # Group Interest Measures Introduced ^b | # of Poverty Measures Introduced ^b | Total # Measures Introduced ^b |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|---|--|
| Seniority | .005 (.014) | -.015 (.010) | -.007 (.024) | -.006 (.009) | .006 (.010) | .016** (.004) |
| Leadership Position | .295 (.188) | -.019 (.129) | .180 (.315) | .087 (.115) | .022 (.121) | .218** (.050) |
| Electoral Margin | 1.189** (.495) | -.062 (.335) | 1.121 (.862) | .292 (.290) | -.192 (.312) | .269* (.125) |
| Total # Measures Introduced | .032** (.005) | .040** (.004) | .056** (.008) | .038** (.003) | .036** (.003) | N/A |

^a Dummy variables to control for state effects also included in analysis.

^b Negative binomial regression analysis

^c Logistic regression analysis

^d In thousands

^e Defined as education, health, welfare, or children's committee

* p < .05, one-tailed test **p < .01, one-tailed test

women will be more likely than other legislators to sponsor at least one measure that focuses on black interests and at least one measure that focuses on women's interests. African American women are indeed substantially and significantly more likely than other legislators to sponsor at least one piece of legislation in both categories. We find mixed support for our fifth hypothesis, that African American women will sponsor a higher total number of measures that focus on either black interests and/or on women's interests. African American women do sponsor a higher total number of group interest measures than do white men, but members of all under-represented groups introduce on average a higher number of group interest measures. (All three coefficients are positive and statistically significant, and the differences between them are not statistically significant.)⁶

We find only weak support for our sixth hypothesis. Women are more likely than men to focus on welfare policy, and the parameter estimates for black women and for non-black women are roughly equivalent in magnitude. But it is only the parameter estimate for non-black women that is statistically significant.

Finally, we find no support for our seventh hypothesis, that African American women will introduce a higher total number of measures than other legislators. Indeed, white legislators—male and female—sponsor significantly more legislation than do other legislators. It is possible that, to the degree that African American women make trade-offs in sponsorship, they are not trade-offs between women's interests and black interests, but rather between group interests and other policies. As Reingold (2000) notes, the question whether group members focus on group interests has a parallel (although rarely addressed) counterpart: whether there are other policies (e.g., "men's" issues) that they are *less* likely to address.

Several other factors influence the sponsorship of group interest bills. Republicans consistently introduce relatively few black interest and welfare policy measures. The percentage black in the district has a consistent significant positive effect on the sponsorship of group interest legislation. Thus, like prior researchers (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Grose 2005) we find that African American legislators provide a distinct style of representation, even when controlling for partisanship and composition of the legislative district. We also find that a particularly powerful influence on sponsorship choices is serving as chair of a relevant committee. In contrast, membership on a relevant committee, affiliation with the majority party, and other leadership positions rarely make a difference in agenda-setting behavior.

The Effect of Institutional Context

We present the results regarding the effect of institutional context on the agenda-setting behavior of African American women in Table 5. Recall that our eighth hypothesis is that African American women will sponsor fewer black interest measures in legislatures with a relatively high degree of racial diversity, and our ninth hypothesis is that African American women will sponsor fewer women's interest measures in legislatures with a relatively high degree of gender diversity. The sponsorship of black interest measures by African American women is not influenced by the proportion of African Americans in the legislature; indeed, the results indicate that legislators in general do not vary their sponsorship of black interest measures based on the percentage of African Americans within the chamber. In other words, our eighth hypothesis receives little support.

The data do support, however, our ninth hypothesis: African American women (but not other women) indeed sponsor fewer women's interest measures in relatively gender-diverse legislatures. Gender diversity in the chamber, however, has no effect on the number of women's interest measures sponsored by non-African American women. The stronger effect of gender diversity (compared to the effect of racial diversity) on the behavior of African American women may be due to two factors. First, there are generally higher numbers of women in the chamber than of African Americans. Therefore, it is possible that in chambers with relatively high gender diversity, there are enough women to focus on women's interest measures, and, even if African American women reduce their sponsorship of these measures, others will still place them on the agenda. Indeed, the number of women's interest measures introduced in a chamber is consistently higher than the number of black interest measures; some of the issues that are considered in this study to be women's interest issues (such as safe-haven laws, in which women are given the option to place their newborn in a safe setting with no questions asked) generate a high degree of support across legislators, regardless of race or sex. Second, it is also the case that men are much more likely to sponsor a women's interest measure than whites are to sponsor a black interest measure, further adding to the number of individuals that are willing to place women's interests on the agenda.⁷

The results also suggest that men sponsor relatively few women's interest measures in chambers with relatively few women, lending support to prior arguments that the policy interests of men may actually be influenced by the presence of women. Prior research has found that sex

TABLE 5. Negative Binomial Regression Analysis, Number of Bills Sponsored (Standard Errors in Parentheses)^a

| | # Black Interest Measures Introduced ^b | | # Women's Interest Measures Introduced ^b | |
|---|---|-----------------------|---|--------------------|
| | Black Legislators | Non-Black Legislators | Female Legislators | Male Legislators |
| Intercept | -3.211* (1.545) | -3.646** (.672) | -.744 (.701) | -1.738** (.450) |
| Female Legislator | .275 (.422) | -.244 (.376) | -.275 (.434) | .117 (.369) |
| Republican Legislator | N/A | -.653** (.217) | -.469* (.219) | .101 (.148) |
| Female Legislator in Chamber with Low Racial Diversity | .078 (.813) | .785 (.517) | -.022 (.650) | -.161 (.404) |
| Female Legislator in Chamber with High Racial Diversity | -.063 (.538) | -.449 (.625) | -1.017* (.544) | .595 (.450) |
| Legislator in Chamber with Low Racial Diversity | -1.008* (.586) | -.136 (.428) | .180 (.513) | -1.382** (.295) |
| Legislator in Chamber with High Racial Diversity | -.742 (.552) | .227 (.488) | -.003 (.434) | -.341 (.292) |
| Percentage Black in District | .020* (.012) | .017* (.008) | .012 (.008) | .003 (.006) |
| Average Income in District ^d | .036* (.020) | .010 (.009) | .003 (.007) | .016** (.006) |
| Membership on Relevant Committee ^e | .222 (.249) | .013 (.207) | .025 (.213) | -.170 (.132) |
| Chair of Relevant Committee ^e | .307 (.466) | .017 (.395) | -.020 (.327) | 1.042** (.219) |

TABLE 5. (continued)

| | # Black Interest Measures Introduced ^b | | # Women's Interest Measures Introduced ^b | |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|------------------|
| | Black Legislators | Non-Black Legislators | Female Legislators | Male Legislators |
| Affiliation in Majority Party | -1.390* (.743) | -.219 (.213) | -.067 (.234) | .077 (.140) |
| Seniority | .044* (.021) | -.015 (.020) | .004 (.017) | -.025* (.012) |
| Leadership Position | -.299 (.366) | .496* (.232) | .004 (.017) | -.100 (.144) |
| Electoral Margin | 1.225 (1.484) | 1.275* (.555) | -.473 (.638) | -.108 (.394) |
| Total Number of Measures Introduced | .040** (.007) | .030** (.006) | .036** (.008) | .040** (.004) |

^a Dummy variables to control for state effects also included in analysis.

^b Negative binomial regression analysis

^c Logistic regression analysis

^d In thousands

^e Defined as education, health, welfare, or children's committee

* p < .05, one-tailed test **p < .01, one-tailed test

differences are most pronounced in legislatures with very few women (e.g., Bratton 2005). Our findings with this more recent collection of data are compatible with this conclusion: as more women serve in a chamber, they may influence men, and sex differences may narrow.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings underscore the recent recognition by scholars that minority and female legislators can and do respond to multiple constituencies, and this is particularly true at the sponsorship stage of the legislative process (Canon 1999). Grose (2005), for instance, finds that even when controlling for partisanship and district demographics, African American legislators are more likely to support black interests. We find that even when controlling for partisanship and district demographics, African American women are more likely to focus on *both* women's interests and black interests. Indeed, the sponsorship of African American interest measures correlates highly for African Americans and women, and particularly for African American women, with the sponsorship of women's interest measures. This parallels Simien's (2005) recent findings that, in the mass public, racial identification enhances rather than detracts from gender identification.

To some degree, the choices made by individual legislators are influenced by the institutional context in which they work. Specifically, our research shows that when deciding whether or not to introduce women's interest legislation, black female legislators "look around" to see how many other women are poised to do the same. If they see relatively few female colleagues, they are more likely to take the initiative themselves. The pressure or incentive to sponsor women's interest bills seems to diminish somewhat when they are surrounded by a relatively high number of female colleagues. (Men, however, are *less* likely to sponsor women's interest measures in settings with very few women.) Their decisions regarding the sponsorship of black interest measures are impervious to the racial composition of the chamber. An African American woman, like the African American man, sponsors (on average) the same number of black interest measures whether they are one of few African American legislators or one of many. As noted above, the difference between the response of African American women to increased racial diversity and their response to increased gender diversity may be due to the difference between the number of black interest measures sponsored by other legislators and the number

of women's interest measures sponsored by other legislators; not only are there generally more women than African Americans within these legislative chambers, but the likelihood that a male legislator will sponsor a women's interest measure is higher than the likelihood that a non-black legislator will sponsor a black interest measure.

As this article demonstrates, the legislative activity of African American women is a particularly interesting avenue through which to explore the intersections of race, gender, and political representation. We have several suggestions for future research. We find here, somewhat surprisingly, that African Americans sponsor fewer measures overall than do other legislators; this was particularly surprising given the results from prior research, and given the multiple constituencies that African American women legislators serve. However, the total number of bills sponsored is but a small snapshot of legislative activity. Future research should explore how the intersection of gender and race influences a broader set of legislative activities, including committee participation.

Future research may also benefit from shifting the unit of analysis from the legislator to the state legislature. As Cammisa and Reingold (2004) note, with few exceptions (e.g., Crowley 2004), very little attention has been paid to the effect of gender and racial diversity within legislatures on state policy outputs. State expenditures and policy innovations may be particularly sensitive to the intersections of race and gender in state legislatures. Much research is needed on whether and how the fates of gender- and race-related policies are tied together. It is here that the agenda-setting and coalition-building activities of women of color, as well as the gender and racial composition of the legislature, may prove most important.

Finally, our own research has been constrained by the limited number of states examined and the cross-sectional nature of our data. A larger multi-state and multi-year database would allow researchers to capture more fully the variations in the racial and gender composition of state legislatures. It would also allow us to examine how changes in the gender and racial composition of state legislatures affect individual legislators and policy outcomes over time. Such a large, pooled, and time-series database would be particularly advantageous for researchers interested in gauging the effects of very recent and very dramatic growth in the number of African American women in office.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2005 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington DC, September 1-4.

2. Earlier studies on gender and representation tended to focus on roll call voting behavior. Many of these studies did uncover gender differences, although it is clear that gender differences vary across issue, place, and time (e.g., Vega and Firestone 1994, Swers 1998, Welch 1985). There is less work on racial differences on roll call voting, but the work that exists suggests that race does influence legislative preferences (Canon 1999), and that the substantial effect persists even after controls for party and constituency are included (Grose 2005).

3. Because event count data tend to be strongly skewed to the right (that is, most legislators introduce either none or just one black interest or women's interest measure; fewer legislators introduce two measures, even fewer legislators introduce three, and so on), OLS is an inappropriate method to analyze these data. Negative binomial regression analysis or Poisson regression analysis is appropriate when the dependent variable is an event count (King 1988). In this case, the negative binomial distribution is an appropriate choice, because a legislator who sponsors one women's/black interest measure is more likely than other legislators to sponsor other such measures. That is, negative binomial regression is appropriate in cases in which there is overdispersion (i.e., the variance of the distribution is greater than the mean).

4. Measuring the dependent variable as an event count rather than as a percentage (while controlling for the total number of bills introduced as an independent variable) minimizes problems of heteroskedasticity (Mebane and Sekhon 2004). However, if the dependent variable is measured as a proportion of all bills introduced by a legislator, the results are substantively the same as those presented in the article.

5. Supplementary correlation analyses indicate that, for women and African Americans, the sponsorship of black interest measures is strongly correlated with the sponsorship of women's interest measures, again suggesting no trade-off across the two groups. This strong correlation is particularly true of African American female legislators. In multivariate models, the number of black interest measures introduced and the number of women's interest measures introduced have a positive but not significant association.

6. Of course, bill sponsorship is only an expression of policy interests, rather than a measure of actual outcomes. Supplementary analyses indicate that racial and gender differences exist in sponsorship of bills that are passed by the chamber. Regardless of race, women on average sponsor more "women's interest measures" that pass than do men. African American women on average sponsored .41 women's interest measures that passed; other women on average sponsored .29 such measures. The comparable averages for African American men and non-African American men were .13 and .19 respectively. When a full set of control variables are included in the analysis, however, only the parameter estimate for non-black female reaches statistical significance, indicating that non-black women introduce significantly more such measures than non-black men. Likewise, African Americans, regardless of sex, sponsor more "black interest" measures that are passed by the chamber; African American women sponsor an average of .27 such measures, whereas African American men sponsor an average of .22 such measures. Among non-African American legislators, women sponsor an average of .04 such measures, and men sponsor an average of .07 such measures. When a full

set of control variables is instituted, however, there are no significant racial differences in the sponsorship of black interest bills that pass the lower chamber.

7. The average number of black interest measures sponsored by white legislators is .25; the average number of black interest measures sponsored by black legislators is 1.03. The average number of women's interest measures sponsored by male legislators is .63; the average number of women's interest measures sponsored by female legislators is 1.10. In supplementary analyses, we also examined whether the presence of African Americans and the presence of women interacted with each other—that is, we examined whether African American women were more likely to sponsor women's interest measures when the number of African Americans was relatively high, but the number of women was relatively low, and whether African American women were more likely to sponsor black interest measures when the number of African Americans was relatively low, but the number of women was relatively high. There was no evidence of such an effect.

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