

Legislating in the First Female-Majority State Legislature: Gendered Power, Leadership, and Patterns of Sponsorship and Cosponsorship¹

Jennie Sweet-Cushman, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science
Chatham University

Rebecca Gill, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Political Science
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Christopher Zorn, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science
Pennsylvania State University

ABSTRACT: In 2019, the Nevada Legislature became the first state legislature in the nation to have a majority of female members; that was followed in 2023 by women having majorities in both houses. Nevada thus offers a first-ever opportunity to study how a legislature is affected by majority female control. In this paper, we examine the implications of Nevada's female majority for the way the legislature functions, with an emphasis on bill sponsorship and co-sponsorship. Feminist institutional theories suggest that while changes in majority control can undermine traditionally gendered institutional practices, such changes often depend on the work of "critical actors," particularly those in positions of formal leadership. Drawing on a database of legislator sponsorship and co-sponsorship behavior across six recent legislative sessions (2013-2023), we find evidence that the evolution of women's legislative power is largely attributable to majorities, rather than to leadership effects.

¹ Paper prepared for presentation at the 2024 Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, March 28-30, 2024, Vancouver, BC. This is a preliminary draft, and part of a larger work on gender and politics in the Nevada legislature; comments and suggestions are especially welcome.

Introduction

In 2020, the state of Nevada offered a special license plate for passenger vehicles, one recognizing the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. The legislation authorizing the plate, Assembly Bill 499, not only recognized women's history, but also made history: it was the first piece of legislation in the state to be signed into law after being sponsored only by women, and—most notably—passed by the first majority-female state legislature in U.S. history. The plate and the legislature where it originated are thus powerful symbols of women's representation in American politics.

Beginning in 2019, the Nevada legislature provides the first-ever opportunity to study how an American state legislature may be different under majority female control as women have been underrepresented in virtually every other legislative context and in every other time in history. The underrepresentation of women in government has long seemed an intractable problem, appearing to many to be “a permanent feature of the political system” (Sanbonmatsu 2020, 40). However, the 2018 election cycle saw unprecedented gains in female representation in federal, state, and local government and in 2019, the Nevada Legislature became the first state legislature in the nation to be majority female.

This may be new to the American political context, but comparative politics scholars have been gleaning insights about the impact of women's growing representation can have on institutions all over the world. Here, we draw on this work to apply a feminist institutionalism (FI) framework to understanding how the presence of women in American institutions may or may not alter the culture, function, and outcomes of those bodies. We use this first-ever female majoritarian legislature in Nevada to test questions about how shifts in majoritarian power interact with gender within an American institution.

As such, in this paper, we examine the implications of this female majority for the way the legislature functions with a specific focus on gendered patterns of bill sponsorship and co-sponsorship. Drawing on this unique research environment, we first identify changes in gendered power dynamics, then through a set of critical research questions, focus on sponsorship of legislation as a critical indicator of legislative power. We utilize a database of legislator co-sponsorship behavior (N=479) across six recent biennial legislative sessions (2013-2023) to isolate the impact of the female majority.

Drawing on both legislator and bill-level analyses, we offer four key insights that speak to changes to the legislature amidst this gendered shift. First, we document that not only have women secured a numerical majority in the legislature, but also grown the proportion of leadership positions they hold—driven by an increase in Republican women legislators in leadership. Relatedly, and second, leadership matters to both sponsorship and cosponsorship of bills. Third, ultimately, women in the Nevada legislature have tended to both sponsor and cosponsor more legislation over time during the past decade. Finally, we also find evidence of women’s greater effectiveness, as—over time—legislation sponsored by women garnered a higher rate of female cosponsors. Very much in the spirit of FI, these findings provide a portrait of a legislature where while women’s influence has grown steadily in recent years, it appears to be in line with a majoritarian shift lacking a dramatic shift in gendered power dynamics inspired by the actions of critical actors.

Women and the Nevada Legislature

Nevada has a part-time legislature, which research would suggest increases the likelihood that women will be represented there (Squire 1992). Per the state’s constitution, in odd numbered years legislators from across the state meet starting the first week of February in Carson City, Nevada. The legislature is required to be in session for 120 adjacent days. Anything outside of

that window is considered a special session. Between sessions is the “interim,” when legislative committees meet to hear reports and presentations and to discuss public policy pertaining to their assigned topics. Interim committees are often allocated a set number of bill draft requests (BDRs) that almost always become bills during the following legislative session. Legislative committees provide an opportunity for legislators to learn how to serve as a chair and to become familiar with administrative processes.²

In 1996 voters approved a ballot measure implementing term limits of 12 years on members of the state legislature. On one hand, term limits necessarily open legislative positions to newcomers as predominantly male incumbents are termed out (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Thompson and Moncrief 1993). However, research has found little support for the idea that women might disproportionately gain from the turnover as they have continued to run in lower numbers than men (Bernstein and Chadra 2002; Carey et. al 2006; Carroll and Jenkins 2001). In Nevada, as the number of women candidates grew so did women’s representation in the legislature. Women’s presence in the legislature doubled from the early 1990s (where women held 25 percent of the seats) to 2019 (Center for American Women in Politics 2021). Of course, mentoring opportunities for newly elected women are somewhat limited because incumbents are turned out after twelve years.

The 2018 November election resulted in Nevada electing more women to both chambers than ever before, as well as a Democratic governor and majority in the legislature. Following appointments made due to open seats, in 2019, the Nevada State Legislature became the first legislature in history to have a first female majority. This first-time female-majority legislature convened Nevada’s 80th legislative session on February 4th, 2019 and continued into the 81st

² As we describe elsewhere, over the last twenty years increasing numbers of women have gained leadership experience through this interim process.

session in 2021, prompting questions about how this new woman-led institution would function and what sort of legislative product would result.

Feminist Institutionalism

Feminist institutionalism (FI) provides a lens for examining the case of Nevada. This theory focuses on the study of political institutions through a feminist lens by considering both how gender influences an institution and how the gendered actors within an institution respond to the structures. The primary contributions of the theory include conceptualizing gender as central to power dynamics in institutions (Chappell, 2010; Kenny, 2007) and—following—an enhanced understanding of informal institutions (Chappell 2006, 2014; Thompson 2015), institutional change (Kenny and Mackay, 2009), and (Kenny 2007, Kenny and Mackay, 2009; Mackay et al., 2010) power.

Ultimately, feminist institutionalists aim to uncover how institutions shape and reflect gender roles, gendered power dynamics, and inequities within and emerging from the institution. Traditional political institutions (i.e. where men maintain majoritarian power) tend to perpetuate discrimination and marginalization of women. In the context of a legislature, Krook and Mackay (2011) highlights how gender hierarchies are reinforced by operating within an institutional framework that rewards male norms and perspectives. Institutions can serve as mechanisms for either perpetuating or transforming gender relations, depending on how they are structured and operated (Waylen 1994). A change in how majorities are comprised in a legislature is ultimately an opportunity for transformation. That is, to the extent that institutions are gendered, they have the potential to be “regendered” (Beckwith 2005).

Crucial to Nevada, however, FI emphasizes the need to look beyond numerical representation of women in political institutions. While the percentage of women in an institution

certainly should and does matter, the institution's rules, norms, and practices (both formal and informal) may limit the impact gender may have on political processes (Krook and True 2012). This would include how these factors shape women's participation in political decision-making within the legislature. As such, patriarchal tendencies within the institution may remain entrenched and the institution may resist transformation (Mackay 2014) or shifts in gendered power dynamics might encourage institutional transformation.

Jennifer Thompson (2018) also points to “critical actors” (Childs and Krook 2006, 2009) as a way to further understand the conditions that do and do not lead to institutional change. In this conception, the number of women is less important than the existence a smaller group of strategically positioned women who are motivated to encourage gendered change in the institution.

We thus first examine the importance of critical actors in the Nevada legislature and how the contours of power (i.e. leadership) have shifted in recent sessions. We then consider the intersection of gender and legislative function over time to consider whether a female majority in the legislature is sufficient to see transformation in legislative process and outcomes.

Legislative Function and Output

Scholarship on legislative function in state legislatures and Congress have provided a rich understanding of the role of gender in the legislative process, including bill sponsorship, cosponsorship, and bipartisanship. Unfortunately, this knowledge (as it relates to the U.S.-specific context, at least) comes exclusively from what FI would label “traditional institutions”: majority-male legislatures. This is not to say that the impact of women legislators on the legislative process has been ignored in the literature. To the contrary, gender has been a key dimension of this research for decades.

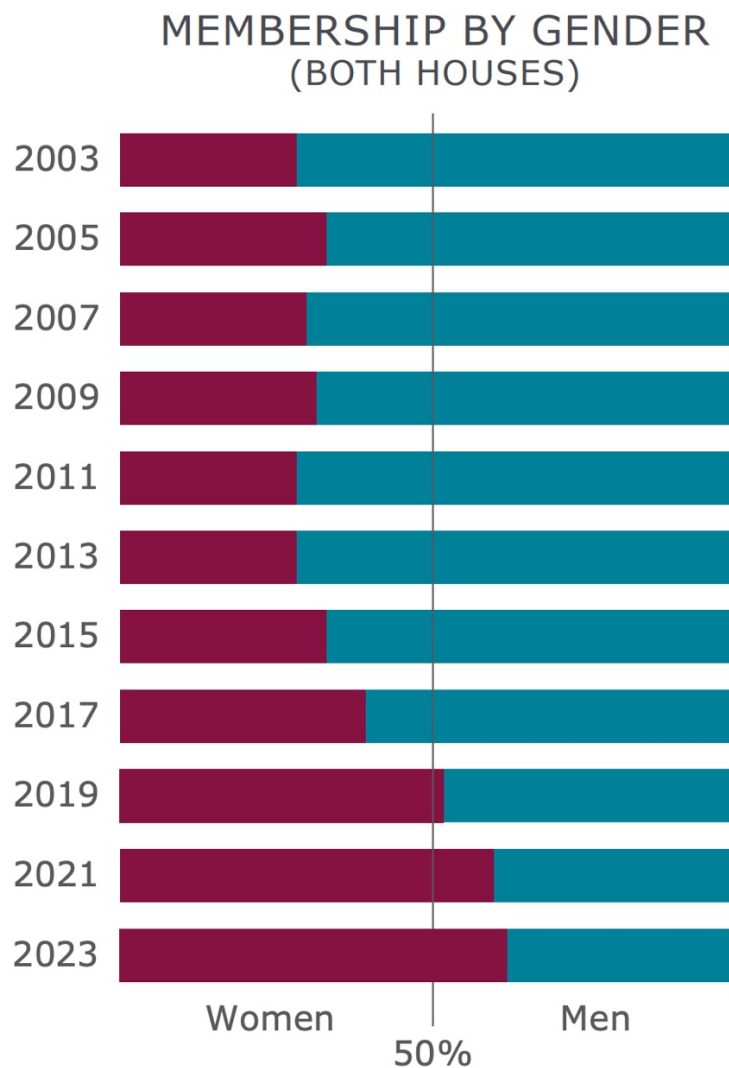
Legislative productivity is generally framed in terms of “effectiveness.” This framing defines productivity as normatively good. Beginning with the 103rd - 105th Congresses, scholars have considered whether gender was a factor in driving the effectiveness of members of Congress. Jeydel and Taylor (2003) finds that, while there were a number of characteristics of lawmakers that seemed to enhance a lawmaker’s ability to get their sponsored legislation signed into law, gender was not one of them.

There has been less examination of women’s effectiveness in state legislatures in the United States. An early study found that women’s effectiveness as legislators (as compared to men) was hindered by two features that invoke FI: a male-dominated power structure (Stanley & Blair 1989) and lack of strong personal connections with their colleagues (Blair & Stanley 1991). Still, this work seemed to recognize that there were opportunities for a greater contribution from women legislators should their relative numbers advance beyond tokenism (Stanley & Blair 1989, Blair and Stanley 1989). This seems to have been borne out by more recent work finding that women may indeed be more effective legislators than men when they are not relegated to a tiny minority of the legislative body (Sweet-Cushman 2020; Volden, Wiseman, Wittner 2013).

As women’s representation in legislatures around the country grows, we anticipate that there will be subtle changes in how institutions operate as the number of women increases. However, there are conflicting causal mechanisms that make it difficult to predict how the presence of more women will impact the legislative process. On the one hand, women may have different orientations to their work as legislators that enhance their likelihood of participating in certain legislative behaviors that impact their productivity—which would be enhanced by the presence of more women. On the other hand, some of these behaviors may reflect the gendered power dynamics in the legislature and manifest as an effort to compensate for the paucity of

women in the legislature. In this case, these behaviors (and, in turn, women’s productivity) might eventually be diminished by a power structure dominated by women.

It is clear that, in the case of the Nevada legislature, women’s presence is far more than a tiny sliver of the body. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the representation of women in the Nevada legislature has grown significantly in the past two decades. Nonetheless, the culture of the institution is unlikely to have shifted beyond the male-dominated culture that defined the institution for the preceding century and a half. **Figure 1: Membership in the Nevada Legislature by Gender, 2003-2023**



Source: Legislative Counsel Bureau (2023).

It is not clear, however, just how gains in effectiveness would manifest in the various metrics of legislative behavior. There are several possibilities here. First, it is possible that women's higher levels of productivity may be a function of their initiating more legislation. This would be a reasonable consequence of a "Jill Robinson effect" (Anzia and Berry 2011), since more primary bill sponsorship is a reasonable outcome of the harder work women have put into their jobs as legislators. However, it is possible that more women and a shift in gendered dynamics may lessen the need for women to compensate by working harder. We thus investigate whether women will sponsor more legislation than men in the legislature (RQ1).

We also expect that shifts in gendered leadership styles within the institution may prompt women in the Nevada legislature to work harder to foster collaboration among their colleagues. Previous research has found that co-sponsorship of bills, a key measure of collaboration, may be more prevalent among women legislators (Sweet-Cushman 2020; Swers 2005; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013; Wojcik and Mullenax 2017). When women are significantly underrepresented in legislatures, this cooperation may be a necessary measure to "bypass their exclusion from the old boys' network" (Holman and Mahoney 2018, 183).

We investigate these co-sponsorship patterns among women, among men, and across gender lines, evaluating the possibility that co-sponsorship will be a strategy that women rely on more, or potentially, less when they have a majority (RQ2). Eventually, we would anticipate a subtle de-gendering of the institution where women's leadership is more broadly executed, and a less stereotypically masculine legislative culture emerges. It is unclear if such a culture will have emerged yet in the Nevada legislature since — as FI would suggest — the horizon required to change institutional culture suggests that new patterns may be slow to emerge.

Leadership (Critical Actors)

As in most legislative bodies, individuals holding such leadership roles play a central role in the business of the Nevada legislature. In the Assembly, the elected Speaker presides over the chamber and is responsible for managing its business. While formally presided over by the Lieutenant Governor, the day-to-day business of the Senate is managed by the Senate President.

But party leaders also play a key role; Nevada's *Legislative Manual* notes that:

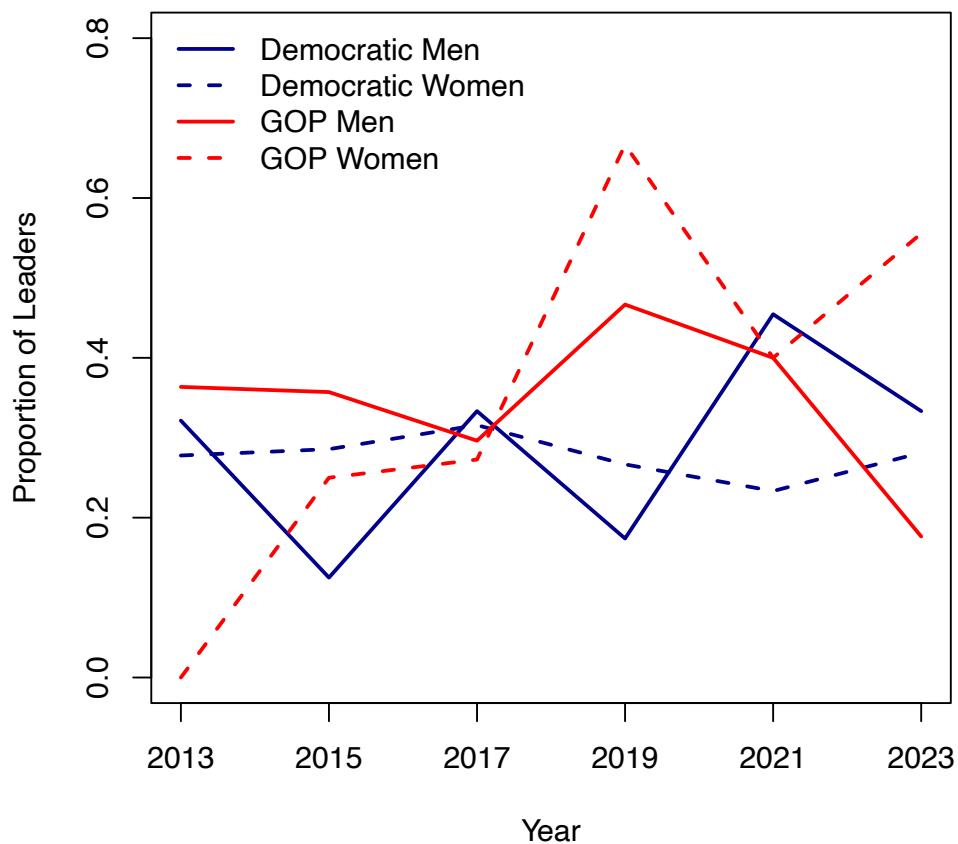
(F)loor leaders are party officials in the Legislature and are responsible for maintaining party discipline in their respective houses. Straight party voting is relatively uncommon in the Nevada Legislature, as members customarily exercise wide latitude in voting. But in certain critical areas, the Majority and Minority Floor Leaders are expected to call a caucus to determine their party's stance on an issue. Once a position is agreed upon, the floor leaders work with the party "whips" to solidify partisan support for the caucus decision. The tenure of the floor leaders extends during the interim between regular sessions of the Legislature and until the organization of the next succeeding regular session (Legislative Counsel Bureau 2019, p. 139).

Viewed in this light, both legislative and party leadership roles are potentially crucial mechanisms by which women can alter the business of the legislature (and, potentially, the institution itself).

For purposes of this paper, we define a leadership position to be a formal role — either legislative or partisan — that a member holds during a particular legislative session. Because such roles vary and change in their nature and number from one session to another (as a function of, among other things, whether a party is in the majority or minority), we adopt an inclusive definition. We consider a legislator to be a member of leadership if they hold either a legislative leadership position (Speaker, Speaker Pro Tem, President, President Pro Tem, Majority / Minority Leader) or a party leadership role (Floor Leader, Assistant / Deputy Floor Leader, Chief Whip, Assistant / Deputy Whip, Caucus Policy Coordinator, etc.). The title and number of such

roles varies by party and session with little clear pattern, and in general members move in and out of such leadership positions relatively frequently.

Figure 2: Proportion of Nevada Legislators in Leadership Positions, by Sex and Party, 2013-2023



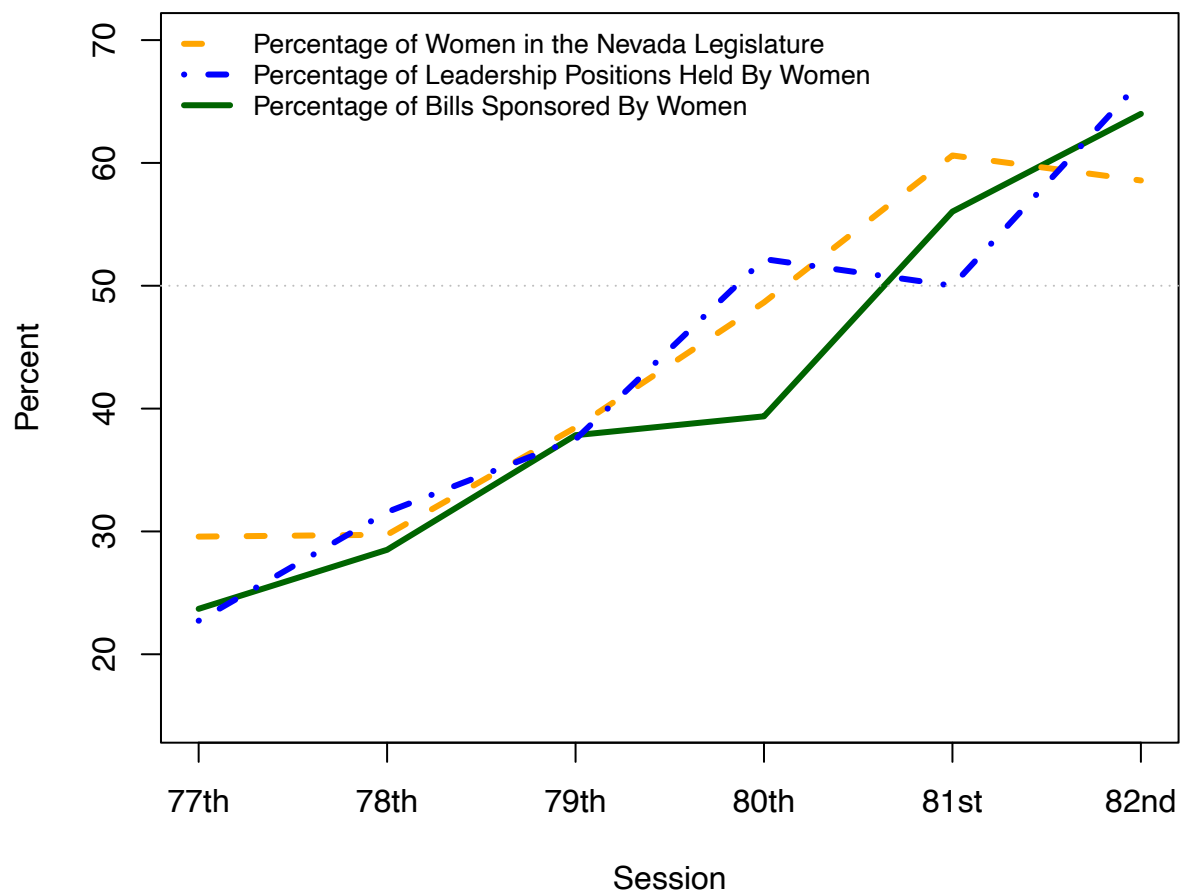
Note: Data collected by the authors, from the Nevada Legislature's "Session Information" page (<https://www.leg.state.nv.us/session/>). See text for details.

Figure 2 plots the proportion of Nevada legislators who held leadership positions (as defined above) by sex and party from 2013-2023. Because of its relatively small size, a comparatively high proportion of members in leadership roles; on average, in any given session about thirty percent of legislators held such a role.³ The prevalence of women in such roles varies

³ Note that Figure 2 does not plot the proportion of leaders in each party-gender category; as a result, the proportions in any given session do not sum to 1.0.

by both session and party, but not in particularly discernable ways. For example, during the period we examine, Nevada Republicans controlled the legislature for only one session, the 78th (2015); yet that term is not particularly different in terms of leadership than are others in the data. Between 2013 and 2023, a higher proportion of women legislators served in leadership. But while greater numbers of Republican women came to take on leadership roles over the period studied, the proportion of Democratic women holding such positions remained constant.

Figure 3: Percentage of Female Legislators, Female Leaders, and Bills Primarily Sponsored by Women, Nevada Legislature, 2013-2023



Note: Percentage women and leadership data were collected by the authors; primary sponsorship data were drawn from Legiscan (2024). See text for details.

Figure 3 provides additional descriptive context for women in the Nevada legislature and adds a key measure of legislative impact: sponsorship. Bills in the Nevada legislature are designated with a "primary" sponsor: the legislator who is generally responsible for the crafting and introduction of the bill in question. While, as we see below, cosponsorship is commonplace and widespread, primary sponsorship is of particular significance.⁴ Sponsors initiate the bill drafting process and are responsible for approving the language in the bill draft prior to its introduction; they are also solely able to give permission for divulgence of the content of a bill. More important, in Nevada as elsewhere bill sponsorship plays an important role in legislative position-taking and credit-claiming (e.g., Neal 2024).

As described above, Figure 3 illustrates the trend toward greater numbers of women in the Nevada legislature, and the corresponding increases in the proportion of leadership positions held by women. It also shows that the percentage of bills sponsored by women legislators has increased steadily since 2013, from a low of around one in four to a high of nearly two in three. Interestingly, however, the sponsorship measure seems to lag behind the other two; while women made up nearly half of all legislators (and more than half of the leadership) in the 80th legislative session (2019), they were responsible for sponsoring only about 40 percent of the legislation introduced. Those numbers increased rapidly after 2019, and rough proportionality across the three indicators once again prevailed in 2023.

While informative, by themselves the aggregated data in Figure 3 do not allow us to disentangle the separate potential effects of membership change and leadership on bill sponsorship. Accordingly, we turn to more granular data to assess these competing explanations.

⁴ In Nevada, a bill may be simultaneously sponsored by members of both the Assembly and the Senate. They may also be sponsored by a committee, rather than an individual member. Here, we ignore bills with committee — rather than individual — sponsors, though in the future we plan to investigate differences between member-sponsored and committee-sponsored legislation.

Data and Methods

We examine these questions using a mixed methodology to explore patterns both collectively (through session data) and individually, through the eyes of legislators who served during these historic sessions. More specifically, we compiled two datasets characterizing patterns of bill sponsorship and cosponsorship from the 77th to 82nd Nevada legislative sessions (2013-2023). Those data were primarily scraped from LegiScan (LegiScan 2024), and supplemented with data from the *Legislator Diversity Project* (Neville and Flick 2023). Our process yields 433 observations at the legislator/session level, such that there is one entry in the dataset for each legislator for each year.⁵ In addition, we created a dataset with one observation for every bill introduced during the 77th - 82nd terms. There were a total of 6,707 such bills, 3,940 of which were sponsored by individual legislators. Those data include the identities of all primary sponsors and co-sponsors of every piece of legislation.

We operationalize a number of concepts of interest using these data, supplemented with additional publicly-available data about legislators. The latter include leadership positions held (coded as described above), gender, and party identification. In the legislator-level data, the key outcomes of interest are measures of legislative productivity, which we measure in three ways. The first, *Primary Sponsor*, is a simple count of the number of bills for which that legislator was the primary sponsor in the session in question. The second, *Cosponsored*, is the number of bills that legislator cosponsored in that particular session.

Another way of examining shifts in institutional culture is to examine how prominently collaboration, a stereotypically feminine leadership trait, features in bill sponsorship. We create a

⁵ The Nevada legislature comprises 42 members of the Assembly and 21 Senators. The numbers per session here are somewhat higher than that, since they also include observations for legislators who served partial terms after replacing members who departed during sessions.

variable, *Cosponsor Position*, that characterizes each legislator's mean sponsorship position on bills during each session. The bill primary sponsor/author receives a "1," the first cosponsor receives a "2," the second a "3," and so forth. We take the average of this sponsorship position for each member during each session, giving the variable a theoretical range from one (if, for every bill which a member was a cosponsor on, s/he was the first/primary author/sponsor) to either 21 or 42 (in the Senate and Assembly, respectively, if the only bill(s) that a member was a cosponsor on were bills in which the entire chamber were cosponsors, and that member was always the "last" cosponsor). This serves as a measure of how prominent each member was in the rankings of those cosponsors. On this measure, lower numbers correspond to relatively more "important" cosponsors of each bill; members with lower average numbers can thus, on average, be considered more important / effective actors in the chamber.

We also conduct analyses at the level of the individual bill. There, we consider two primary outcomes of interest. The first, *Number of Cosponsors*, is a simple count of the number of cosponsors that each bill has. The second, *Female Cosponsor Percent*, is the percentage of each bill's cosponsors that are female legislators. Each of these two variables reflects a quantity of slightly different substantive interest. A legislator who (for whatever reason) is more effective might be more likely to garner higher numbers of cosponsors on bills for which s/he is the primary sponsor. *Number of Cosponsors* can thus be thought of as a bill-level measure akin to the legislator-level measures described above. In contrast, *Female Cosponsor Percent* reflects the relative degree of support for the bill among female (vs. male) legislators. A female legislator who is particularly adept at writing legislation in a way that obtains higher levels of support among women — including across political parties — might be viewed as particularly effective in a different way than those described above.

In both sets of analyses, our central predictor of interest is the gender of the legislator. For the member-level analysis, we examine whether female legislators grow more effective as their numbers grow in the legislature by interacting the gender of the legislator with the session in question. We also consider whether legislator gender interacts with leadership roles; if the leadership hypotheses above are correct, we would expect to see female leaders being consistently more effective than women without such positions, even after controlling for changes in chamber membership. In addition, because legislative majority parties play an outsized role in setting the legislative agenda, we control for the political party identification of each member, and interact that with a variable denoting the party control of the chamber in that session.⁶

For the bill-level analysis, our primary predictors of interest are the gender of the sponsoring member (*Female Sponsor*). As above, we interact this variable with a counter for the *Legislative Session*, and with a variable indicating whether (=1) or not (=0) the sponsor of the bill held a position of leadership (*Leader Sponsor*). As above, we also include control variables for the political party of the sponsoring legislator, interacting that with an indicator for party control of the chamber. Summary statistics for both data sets can be found in the Appendix (Tables A.1 and A.2). Our modeling decisions are driven primarily by the nature of our outcome variables. Because they are count variables, we use Poisson regression for both *Primary Sponsor* and *Cosponsors* in the member-level regressions, and linear (OLS) regression for the analysis of *Cosponsor Position*. Our bill-level analyses use linear regression as well, on both (logged) *Number of Cosponsors* and *Female Cosponsor Percent*.

⁶ Democrats controlled both chambers of the Nevada legislature for every session in our data except the 78th (2015). Also, note that we have no reason to believe that differential party control would moderate the gender and leadership hypotheses described above; as a result, we do not interact the party control variables with those for legislator gender and leadership.

Findings

Table 1 presents the results of our legislator-level regressions for the 2013-2023 period. Recall our expectations: If simple majoritarian politics is at work, we would expect to see measures of sponsorship by women legislators growing steadily over time. In addition, if leadership plays an important role, we would expect the interaction of *Female Legislator* and *Leadership Role* to be positive and substantial. Also note that because *Cosponsor Position* is a rank measure, in general we would expect that the estimates for the first two columns will be of the opposite sign of those in the third.

The results in Table 1 are largely consistent with a majoritarian story of evolution in the Nevada legislature. Unsurprisingly given existing work (e.g., Barber 1966; Bratton and Rouse 2011), the data suggest that individuals holding leadership roles both sponsor and cosponsor greater numbers of bills, and tend to appear earlier among cosponsors of legislation which they cosponsor. More importantly for our purposes, the results also suggest that women in the Nevada legislature have tended to both sponsor and cosponsor more legislation over time during the past decade, a result consistent with the idea that greater female legislative majorities have translated to more policy impact.

At the same time, we note that the coefficients for the interaction terms *Female Legislator* \times *Leadership Role* are uniformly small and imprecisely estimated. This suggests — after controlling for the fact that women have comprised a greater proportion of the legislators in Nevada—women are no more advantaged by holding leadership positions than are men. To be sure, those advantages are substantial, and the fact that women have come to hold a greater share of leadership positions in the legislature has undoubtedly increased their aggregate influence. But

contra some FI theories, there is no evidence that, at least with respect to sponsorship dynamics, women are uniquely advantaged by such positions.

Table 1: Legislator-Level Models of Bill Sponsorship and Cosponsorship, 2013-2023

<i>Predictors</i>	Primary Sponsor	Cosponsored	Cosponsor Position
(Intercept)	1.88 (1.07)	11.35*** (0.45)	73.71*** (12.94)
Female Legislator	-3.49* (1.61)	-4.07*** (0.66)	-11.55 (18.73)
Legislative Session	<0.01 (0.01)	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.81*** (0.16)
Leadership Role	0.68*** (0.04)	0.39*** (0.02)	-1.45* (0.56)
Female Legislator × Legislative Session	0.04* (0.02)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.15 (0.24)
Female Legislator × Leadership Role	0.02 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.61 (0.85)
GOP Legislator	-0.08* (0.04)	-0.07*** (0.02)	-0.10 (0.46)
GOP Majority Session	-0.07 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.02)	-2.05** (0.74)
GOP Legislator × GOP Majority Session	0.16 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.89 (1.03)
<i>N</i>	433	433	412

Note: Entries in columns one and two are Poisson regression estimates; column three reports OLS estimates. Cell entries are coefficient estimates; standard errors are in parentheses. One asterisk indicates $P < 0.05$, two indicate $P < 0.01$, three indicate $P < 0.001$ (two-tailed). See text for details.

The story is largely similar when we examine results at the bill level. With respect to numbers of cosponsors, we find little in the way of systematic influence; neither gender nor leadership appears to be marginally associated with the number of cosponsors a bill garners. The sole systematic findings are a discrete decline in the number of cosponsors over time, along with what appears to be some party-control effects.

Table 2: Bill-Level Models of Cosponsorship, 2013-2023

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>ln(Number of Cosponsors)</i>	<i>Female Cosponsor Percentage</i>
(Intercept)	1.35*** (0.06)	13.71*** (1.28)
Female Sponsor	-0.04 (0.09)	-1.65 (1.93)
Legislative Session (77th = 1)	-0.09*** (0.01)	2.10*** (0.30)
Leader Sponsor	-0.09 (0.05)	-1.09 (0.96)
Female Sponsor × Legislative Session	0.04 (0.02)	1.05* (0.45)
Female Sponsor × Leader Sponsor	0.10 (0.07)	0.05 (1.48)
GOP Sponsor	0.03 (0.04)	-8.17*** (0.85)
GOP Majority Session	0.21** (0.07)	2.25 (1.50)
GOP Sponsor × GOP Majority Session	-0.32** (0.10)	1.80 (2.00)
R ² / Adjusted R ²	0.020 / 0.018	0.075 / 0.073

Note: $N = 3,896$. Cell entries are OLS coefficient estimates; standard errors are in parentheses. One asterisk indicates $P < 0.05$, two indicate $P < 0.01$, three indicate $P < 0.001$ (two-tailed). See text for details.

Turning to female cosponsorship, we find results like those described above: while, among non-leaders in early sessions, there are no important differences between male and female sponsors in terms of their support among women, such differences grow over the course of the period studied. Once again, the data appear consistent with the idea that increasing female

majorities in the Nevada legislature were increasingly able to grow their effectiveness, here in the form of crafting legislation that attracted higher proportions of female cosponsors.⁷

Summary and Conclusions

At this writing, the impact of the recent transformation of the Nevada legislature with respect to its members' gender is neither clear nor complete. While other legislative bodies in the U.S. have seen substantial growth in their female membership (particularly since 2016), none has had—and looks to keep — a majority of women members. Our analyses here paint an initial picture of that impact, albeit for one relatively narrow aspect of legislative behavior. The findings from those analyses suggest that it is largely through majoritarian politics, rather than via leaders or legislative entrepreneurs, that women have come to be the dominant force in the Nevada Assembly and Senate. While we don't wish to downplay the importance of leadership positions — our analyses make clear that leaders remain an important influence in Nevada legislative politics — our results are also consistent with the history and norms of that body.

Beyond these findings, our analysis here raises a number of additional questions that we are currently investigating. Chief among these is the question of legislative *success*. Sponsorship is a necessary but not sufficient condition for policy impact; introducing bills with little or no chance of passage does little to change the political landscape for the citizens of the state. In our larger look at Nevada under women, we tackle the question of impact: when, and by what margins, do bills pass and become laws?

⁷ While we note the strong, negative association between Republican-sponsored bills and the percentage of women cosponsors of such bills, we hesitate to give this result a causal interpretation (Keele et al. 2020). However, given the recent ideological turn of the Republican party nationwide, we find this result unsurprising, and in fact expected the difference to be much larger than it is in the regression. We attribute this to the aforementioned tendency for the Nevada legislature to operate on a bipartisan basis, and on the relative moderation of the Nevada Republican party (at least as of 2024).

Equally important are questions of legislative agenda-setting. It would be surprising if a historically underrepresented minority, when first seizing majority control, were to focus on identical issues to those in the past. Our ongoing work thus investigates not only the sources of the Nevada legislature's work, but also its content. To what extent do women determine the state's legislative agenda? How does that agenda differ from past sessions? What issues rise to the fore, and are such changes (if any) transitory or permanent? We continue to investigate these questions and others, with the goal of painting a comprehensive picture of this historic institution.

References

- Barber, James D. 1966. "Leadership Strategies for Legislative Party Cohesion." *Journal of Politics* 28(2):347-367.
- Beckwith, Karen. 2005. "A Common Language of Gender?" *Politics & Gender* 1:128-137.
- Bernstein, Robert A., and Anita Chadha. 2002. "The Effects of Term Limits on Representation: Why So Few Women?" In *The Test of Time: Coping with Legislative Term Limits*, ed. Rick Farmer, John David Rausch, and John C. Green. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Blair, Diane D., and Jeanie R. Stanley. 1991. "Personal Relationships and Legislative Power: Male and Female Perceptions." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 16:495-507.
- Boyatzis, Richard E. 1998. *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bratton, Katherine A., and Stella M. Rouse. 2011. "Networks in the Legislative Arena: How Group Dynamics Affect Cosponsorship." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 36:423-460
- Carey, John M., Richard G. Niemi, and Lynda W. Powell. 1998. "The Effects of Term Limits on State Legislatures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 23(2): 271.
- Carroll, Susan J., and Krista Jenkins. 2001. "Unrealized Opportunity? Term Limits and the Representation of Women in State Legislatures." *Women and Politics* 23(4): 1-30.
- Center for American Women in Politics. 2021. *State Fact Sheet - Nevada*. URL: http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/state_fact_sheets/nv. Last accessed March 20, 2024.
- Chappell, Louise. 2006. "Comparing Political Institutions: Revealing the Gendered 'Logic of Appropriateness'." *Politics & Gender* 2(2): 223-235.
- Chappell, Louise. 2014. "Conflicting Institutions and the Search for Gender Justice at the International Criminal Court." *Political Research Quarterly* 67(1): 183-196.
- Chappell, Louise. 2010. "Comparative Gender and Institutions: Directions for Research." *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (1): 183-189.
- Childs, Sarah, and Mona Lena Krook. 2006. "Should Feminists Give up on Critical Mass? A Contingent Yes." *Politics and Gender* 2(4): 522-530.
- Crabtree, Benjamin F., and William F. Miller. 1999. "A Template Approach to Text Analysis: Developing and Using Codebooks." In B. Crabtree and W. Miller (Eds.), *Doing Qualitative Research* pp. 163-177. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Darcy, Robert, Janet Clark, and Susan Welch. 1994. *Women, Elections, and Representation*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Fereday, Jennifer, and Eimear Muir-Cochrane. 2006. "Demonstrating Rigor Using Thematic Analysis: A Hybrid Approach of Inductive and Deductive Coding and Theme Development." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5(1):80-92.
- Holman, Mirya R., Anna Mahoney, and Emily Hurler. 2022. "Let's Work Together: Bill Success via Women's Cosponsorship in U.S. State Legislatures." *Political Research Quarterly* 75:676-690.
- Keele, Luke, Randolph T. Stevenson, and Felix Elwert. 2020. "The Causal Interpretation of Estimated Associations in Regression Models." *Political Science Research and Methods* 8:1-13.
- Kenny, Meryl 2007. "Gender, Institutions and Power: A Critical Review." *Politics* 27(2):91-100.
- Kenny, Meryl, and Fiona Mackay. 2009. "Already Doin' it for Ourselves: Skeptical Notes on Feminism and Institutionalism." *Politics & Gender* 5(2):271-280.
- Krook, Mona Lena, and Fiona Mackay, eds. *Gender, Politics and Institutions: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism*. Vol. 1. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Krook, Mona Lena, and Jacqui True. 2012. "Rethinking the life cycles of international norms: The United Nations and the global promotion of gender equality." *European Journal of International Relations* 18(1):103-127.
- Lawless, Jennifer L., and Sean M. Theriault. 2017. "Sex, Bipartisanship, and Collaboration in the U.S. Congress." *Political Parity*. URL: <https://www.politicalparity.org/>. Last accessed March 20, 2024.
- LegiScan. 2024. "Nevada Legislative Datasets." URL: <https://legiscan.com/NV/datasets>. Last accessed March 20, 2024.
- Legislative Counsel Bureau. 2019. *Legislative Manual of the State of Nevada: 80th Session*. URL: <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research>. Last accessed March 20, 2024.
- Legislative Counsel Bureau (Research Division), Nevada Legislature. 2023. "Women in the Nevada Legislature." Available at: <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/>. Last accessed March 20, 2024.

- Mackay, Fiona, Meryl Kenny and Louise Chappell. 2010. "New Institutionalism Through a Gender Lens: towards a feminist institutionalism?" *International Political Science Review* 31(5): 573-588.
- Mackay, Fiona. 2014. "Nested Newness, Institutional Innovation, and the Gendered Limits of Change." *Politics & Gender* 10(4): 549-571.
- Neal, Dina. 2024. "Our Milestones." *Elect Dina Neal for Senate District 4*. URL: <https://dinaneal.com/milestones/>. Last accessed March 20, 2024.
- Neville, Andy, and Ian Flick. 2023. *The Legislator Diversity Project*. URL: <https://www.legislatordiversity.com/>. Last accessed March 20, 2024.
- Sanbonmatsu, Kira. 2020. "Women's Underrepresentation in the U.S. Congress." *Daedalus* 149(1): 40-55.
- Schilling, Emily U., and Tracy L. Osborn. 2020. "Women in the Majority: Critical Mass and the New Hampshire Senate." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 41(3): 303-19.
- Schilling, Emily U., Abigail A. Matthews, and Rebecca J. Kreitzer. 2023. "Timing Their Positions: Cosponsorship in the State Legislature." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 23:245-266.
- Schutz, Alfred. 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Northwestern University Press: Evanston, Illinois.
- Smooth, Wendy. 2011. "Standing for Women? Which Women? The Substantive Representation of Women's Interests and the Research Imperative of Intersectionality." *Politics and Gender* 7(3): 436-41.
- Squire, Peverill. 1992. "Legislative Professionalization and Membership Diversity in State Legislatures." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 17(1): 69-79.
- Stanley, Jeanie R. and Diane D. Blair. 1989. "Gender Differences in Legislative Effectiveness." In Dodson, Debra L. (ed.) *Gender and Policymaking: Studies of Women in Office*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for the American Woman in Politics.
- Thomson, Jennifer. 2015. "Explaining Gender Equality Difference in a Devolved System: The Case of Abortion Law in Northern Ireland." *British Politics*. DOI: 10.1057/bp.2015.47.
- Thompson, Joel A., and Gary F. Moncrief. 1993. "The Implications of Term Limits for Women and Minorities: Some Evidence from the States." *Social Science Quarterly* 74(2):300309.

- Vis, Barbara, and Sjoerd Stolwijk. 2020. "Conducting Quantitative Studies with the Participation of Political Elites: Best Practices for Designing the Study and Soliciting the Participation of Political Elites." *Quality and Quantity*: 1-37.
- Volden, Craig, Alan E. Wiseman, and Dana E. Wittmer. 2018. "Women's Issues and Their Fates in the U.S. Congress." *Political Science Research and Methods* 6(4): 679-96.
- Waylen, Georgina. 1994. "Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics." *World Politics* 46(3):327-354.

Appendix: Summary Statistics

Table A.1: Summary Statistics, Legislator-Level Data

	Valid <i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Primary Sponsor	433	8.998	6.947	0	42
Cosponsored	433	51.770	31.470	1	146
Mean Position	412	9.196	4.126	1	44.200
Female Legislator	433	0.439	0.497	0	1
Legislative Session	433	79.460	1.690	77	82
Leadership Role	433	0.303	0.460	0	1
GOP Legislator	433	0.395	0.489	0	1
GOP Majority Session	433	0.171	0.377	0	1

Table A.2: Summary Statistics, Bill-Level Data

	Valid <i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Number of Cosponsors	3,940	5.805	8.107	1	63
Female Cosponsor Percent	3,896	18.900	23.410	0	96
Female Sponsor	3,896	0.416	0.493	0	1
Legislative Session	3,919	79.490	1.705	77	82
Leader Sponsor	3,896	0.464	0.499	0	1
GOP Sponsor	3,896	0.403	0.491	0	1
GOP Majority Session	3,919	0.162	0.369	0	1