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Gender and Legislative Leadership: The Impact of Chair Identity on Bill Advancement Out of  
Committee

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## Abstract

### Gender and Legislative Leadership: The Impact of Chair Identity on Bill Advancement Out of Committee

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Within American legislatures, race and gender identities have been shown to play a role in how legislators navigate and access these spaces, including the types of bills they sponsor and the types of bills that ultimately become law. This study investigates patterns of bill advancement at the state legislature committee level, addressing the question of whether diversity in committee leadership impacts the likelihood of advancement out of committee for women's issue bills and bills sponsored by women. With a sample of 13 committees across three jurisdictions, the study tests three sets of hypotheses, first for women's issue bills, then bills sponsored by women, then women's issue bills sponsored by women. To ensure that the analysis captures the compounding effects of race and gender oppression, separate models examine each of these types of bills first along the single axis of gender of the committee chair, then through an intersectional lens of both race and gender. While the results do not indicate significant differences along the single axis of gender, the study does find that women's issue bills and bills regardless of topic sponsored by women of color were much more likely to advance from committees chaired by women of color compared to those chaired by white women. The strong connection between having a woman of color in the chair position and advancement rates for these bills shows that the increased institutional access afforded by the chair position can help to advance the interests of groups as a whole, depending on the group in question. Ultimately, the study reinforces the importance of intersectionality in research on gender and politics, as it suggests that institutional access white women are able to gain from having a white woman in a chair position does not extend to women of color when it comes to advancing their legislation out of committee.

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## Introduction

As the demographics within American legislatures become increasingly reflective of the demographics of the nation, it is important to consider the impact of these changes. Significant research shows that descriptive representatives (representatives who share an identity with a given group) are more likely to prioritize and pursue policy change in areas of substantive interest to that group. As such, a more diverse legislature should theoretically be more attentive to the needs of a diverse population: the more women in a legislature, for example, the more debate and legislation will focus on women's issues. Even with these changes, however, the norms and practices within these legislatures likely remain gendered, such that an individual's gender will affect how they are able to navigate the institution and implement their policy objectives. Therefore, the question of how well a group is represented is not only one of descriptive or substantive representation, but also a question of institutional power, and who is able to access it.

A majority of the research in gender and politics within legislatures focuses on differences between male and female legislators, looking for conditions under which women might be more or less likely to prioritize certain policies, take up certain strategies, or encounter certain barriers. Over time and as women gain more power within legislatures, however, we might hope to see changes in these differences— signs that legislatures are becoming more inclusive places, and easier to navigate regardless of race or gender. Even so, interpreting the dynamics behind these changes presents problems: parity in outcomes such as bill passage or number of leadership roles may indicate more equitable institutions, or simply that marginalized groups have become better at overcoming these barriers that are still in existence.

This research focuses upon the question, what impact does increased power for women within American legislatures have on the functioning of these institutions as a whole? Essentially, does the presence of women in a legislature change the legislature itself? This question engages with theories of gender and how it interacts with institutions to cause outcomes beyond the personal beliefs of the individuals within them (Acker 1992). If increases in women's power within a legislature are able to change the way the legislature is gendered, there might be implications for the link between descriptive and substantive representation. For example, if changes in gendered norms allow female representatives to navigate legislative processes more easily, then we might see an even stronger connection between the number of women in a legislature and legislation passed on women's issues.

With evaluation of bill sponsorship and passage on the committee level, I examine how committees respond as the share of power that women hold on the committee increases. Committee level analysis will allow me to control for most factors, including the jurisdiction. Through this study, I hope to offer a different framing of the question of why representation matters, and one way in which it might contribute to institutional change.

## Literature Review

### Gender and Legislative Institutions

To understand why gender would impact a legislator's effectiveness and access within a legislature, it is important to note the ways in which these spaces are both gendered and raced as institutions. Though research has shown some changes in these trends, (an increase in the number of women's issue bills following increases in the number of women in the legislature, for example) (Bratton 2005), the idea of a gendered institution posits that "even if women reached parity with men in all political, legal, and bureaucratic positions, there is no guarantee that

institutions would operate differently" (Chappell and Waylen 2013, 601). Social norms that privilege certain traits or styles of leadership and communication, as well as more formal rules that might appear neutral but could more heavily burden someone with greater caretaking responsibilities, for example, might shape the way female legislators are able to approach their jobs, and by extension, the outcomes of the legislature as a whole (Chappell and Waylen 2013).

Furthermore, all women will not experience these systems in the same way, as other identities such as one's race or sexual orientation interact with gender to create experiences distinct from those encapsulated by one system of oppression alone (Crenshaw 1989). In an account of the racing-gendering of the US Congress, Mary Hawkesworth describes how women of color receive discriminatory remarks and behaviors from their colleagues, including white women, inhibiting their ability to build relationships and form coalitions (Hawkesworth 2003). Similarly, these differences in experiences can lead to differences in substantive representation among women: for example, women of color are shown to be more responsive to advocacy by women's issue groups than white women (Weiner 2021). As such, an intersectional lens is essential in truly understanding the relation between gender and American legislatures. Even as political scientists analyze these dynamics, traditional conceptions of power can fail to capture the extent of the specific inequalities at play. These understandings often focus on coercion, or the ability more generally to achieve a desired outcome (Weldon 2017, 130). However, Weldon outlines a more relational, feminist conception of power under which "some bodies will be perceived as exercising more authority and as commanding more status regardless of whether anyone chooses to exercise that power" (Weldon 2019). Therefore, even in a setting where women have equal presence, they may not necessarily have equal power.

As descriptive representation in both Congress and state legislatures has increased, scholars have examined ways in which this increased presence might drive institutional change. Critical mass theory argues that there is a threshold of descriptive representation at which women or any minority group will change their behavior, and/or receive different responses as a result of no longer holding token status within the setting as a whole. In her 2005 article examining how having a significant number of women in a legislature will affect their substantive representation compared to a setting where there are only a few descriptive representatives, Kathleen Bratton finds that a critical mass can increase the amount of legislation passed on women's issues. If the share of women in a legislature is not correlated with how likely descriptive representatives are to sponsor bills on women's issues (Bratton 2005) but is correlated with how likely they are to pass, this would suggest that the legislature becomes more receptive to women's issues. Another mechanism by which increased descriptive changes can create institutional changes is through the creation of caucuses, which Minta and Sinclair-Chapman refer to as "diversity infrastructure" (2013). If minority caucuses are an example of diversity infrastructure because they allow for sharing of resources, coordination, and more effective communication, then these caucuses might represent institutional change in the form of a coordinated group that did not exist before. This connection suggests that as the number of descriptive representatives in a legislature grows, they do actually change the landscape of the legislature, which has substantive implications.

#### Committee Level Dynamics

As each committee within a legislature has power over which bills are brought to the floor for consideration, speaking patterns within the committees can help to set the agenda for a legislature as a whole. Lyn Kathlene studied this dynamic in Colorado's state legislature in 1994, finding that women, on average, entered discussion later and spoke fewer times and for less total

time than their male counterparts, even as chairs of the committee. These findings remained true of the members on committees chaired by women, though women did enter discussion earlier under those circumstances (Kathlene 1994). Though Kathlene observed that women were less likely both to interrupt and to be interrupted, Michael Miller and Joseph Sutherland (2023) found that women in Congress were significantly more likely to be interrupted. However, both studies show that the sponsor or topic of the bill in question affects who will be most active in discussion. When the bill under discussion was sponsored by a woman, men were more likely to enter conversation earlier while women entered later in the hearing, and women were especially likely to be interrupted during hearings focused on women's issues (Kathlene 1994, Miller and Sutherland 2023). As these gendered speaking patterns frame discussion, we can expect that they might have an impact on bill advancement, as well.

Committee leadership is also an important source of agenda setting power, which means that gender differences in leadership styles could be expected to have a significant impact on the committee as a whole. As of the mid-2000s, at least in more diverse state legislatures, all four race/gender groupings of women of color, men of color, white women, and white men were well represented as chairs of non-prestige committees, though white men tend to be over represented as chairs of prestige committees (Reingold et al 2024). As committee chairs, women often exhibit different types of leadership, speaking later and less in discussion, as well as interrupting other members less than their male counterparts and taking more collaborative approaches to conflict resolution (Kathlene 1994, Rosenthal 2008). This tendency might be traced to a different conception of the role, as women chairs are "more likely to use their position as a facilitator or moderator of committee discussion, rather than as a way to control witness testimony, direct committee discussion, and join in the substantive debate" (Kathlene 561). If women are less

likely to find themselves in positions of leadership and more likely to wield them differently, then the identity of a committee leader might have a significant impact on the content and types of discussions that take place.

These relationships between gender and institutional access have also been shown to impact legislators' overall efficacy, especially when it comes to bill passage. In some circumstances, such as highly polarized legislatures, women in the minority party actually pass more bills than men in the minority party thanks to a more collaborative approach to lawmaking (Volden et al 2013). Bratton and Haynie encountered mixed results: bills sponsored by Black legislators and bills sponsored by women were less likely to pass in some states, though not in others. However, factors such as the sponsor being from an urban district, being in the majority party or party leadership, and having co-sponsors, as well as the subject of the bill all impacted its likelihood of passage (Bratton and Haynie 1999). Bills focusing on women's issues are among the least likely to pass, and of these, the women's issue bills introduced by women are both less likely to advance out of committee, and pass through the legislature as a whole (Volden et al 2018). The fact that women's interest and Black interest bills as well as bills with a Black and/or female sponsor fair differently in different environments suggests both that many of these legislatures are raced-gendered in ways that disadvantage legislators who hold those identities, but also that specific changes within the institution might be able to improve their effectiveness. As more intersectional studies at the state level have found that women are more likely to introduce bills on women's interests and Black legislators are more likely to introduce bills on Black interests, these differences in efficacy have implications for the types of bills that ultimately become law (Bratton and Haynie 1999, Reingold, Widner, and Harmon 2020).

Institutional Change

Operationalizing measurements of institutional change can be a difficult task. Several researchers have posed the question of how increases of descriptive representation for women have impacted male legislators' behavior as one way of measuring how women have impacted the legislature as a whole (Swers 2001, O'Conner 2001). Karen O'Conner uses analysis of Congressional debates on abortion to answer the question of whether the presence of female legislators had changed the way their male colleagues engaged in debate, specifically on the topic of abortion. While women were consistently more likely to focus on maternal health over morality, men became more likely to do so over time as the number of women speakers increased, meaning that male legislators did generally shift the way they debated this issue in a way that more closely resembled the way female legislators framed it (O'Conner 2001). When examining the contexts under which men are more likely to sponsor women's issue bills, Michelle Barnello and Kathlene Bratton (2007) find that gender diversity within a legislature is not related to the likelihood that men will sponsor bills on children's issues, which are typically included under the wider umbrella of women's issues. However, they do not indicate whether gender diversity impacts sponsorship on other women's issues. Therefore, while women's presence may play a role in shaping how issues are debated once they are on the floor, it does not alone seem to impact policy priorities.

### Theory and Hypotheses

Based on this understanding that both formal and informal practices within legislatures often have the impact of decreasing a bill's chance of passage depending on its topic as well as the identity of its sponsor and that increased descriptive representation alone is not always enough to counteract these dynamics, I theorize that the power those with marginalized identities hold within legislatures must also increase to see changes in the success of these bills. Volden,

Wiseman, and Whitmer's study of the passage of women's issue bills in Congress traces challenges back to the committee level, where some of the advantages of having significant descriptive representation such as an identity based caucus might not be as applicable. Furthermore, presence in committee is not a guarantee of equal standing in discussion (Kathlene 1994, Miller and Sutherland 2023). Therefore, I focus on the committee level to better understand the impact of power shifts within these settings. Though the race and gender distribution of chamber and party leadership as well as chair positions of more prestigious committees such as Appropriations still lags behind the levels of representation in many state legislatures as a whole, the chairs of less prestigious committees are generally much more reflective of the wider legislature (Reingold et al 2024). As such, we can question whether the more equitable distribution of these positions has improved outcomes for women's issue bills, as well as bills sponsored by women. Like in Volden's 2018 study, using the bill as a unit of analysis allows me to compare how the rate of advancement for bills with diverse sponsors and topic focuses will be differently impacted as a result of changes in the gender and race of the chair.

Given that women are more likely to include women's interests higher in their policy priorities, having a woman in the role of chairperson could lend a stronger voice to these issues, resulting in greater rates of passage both for women's issue bills and bills sponsored by women. Though many of the benefits of having a critical mass, such as wider and stronger networks, are theorized to take effect beyond the committee setting (Bratton 2005), a chair might be a more valuable connection to have when it comes to advancing bills out of committee. Especially as women tend to view the role of chairperson through a more collaborative lens, we might expect that this style of leadership could also be more compatible with tactics of female committee members. This collaboration would ultimately improve their odds of advancing bills they

support, whether they have sponsored them, or they are just more sympathetic to the topic (Rosenthal 2000). The conditions under which researchers have already found female legislators to be more effective than male legislators lends further support to this idea. Members in the minority party, for example, must rely to a much greater degree on collaboration to see their bills pass, which advantages the legislative styles more typically employed by women (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). This difference is amplified in stages of the legislative process that allow for more coalition building, which typically does not include committee-level discussion (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). However, if female chairs do use their leadership to create more collaborative environments, then these committees, too, could become settings in which women experience greater success. As the same study finds that committee chairs are significantly more effective than other legislators at passing the bills they sponsor, then at the very least one woman should become more effective by virtue of this leadership change.

The ability that female representatives had to frame debate on the Hyde Amendment, as demonstrated by O'Conner, might also be heightened when those words come from the committee chair. By a similar logic, as a significant share of the interests often defined as women's issues are also of higher interest to minority racial groups (Bratton and Haynie 1999), bills on these topics should also be more likely to advance when the chair of the committee is not a white man. However, this trend will likely differ when it comes to the sponsor of the bill. As women of color face both raced and gendered barriers in navigating the legislature, they may not experience the same impact of a white woman as chair. Therefore, I also hypothesize that bills sponsored by women of color will see greater success when the chair is also a woman of color. Controlling for factors such as the partisan, gender, and racial composition of the committee, support for any of these hypotheses would suggest that increases in the power women hold in

committees translate to changes in access, as the barriers facing bills sponsored by women or focusing on women's issues must have decreased.

Hypothesis 1. When the chair of the committee is a woman, women's issue bills will be more likely to advance out of the committee than when the chair is a man.

1a. Given the similarities between various sets of interests, women's interest bills will be more likely to advance out of committee as long as the chair is not a white man.

Hypothesis 2. When the chair of the committee is a woman, bills sponsored by women will be more likely to advance out of committee than when the chair is a man.

2a. When the committee chair is a woman of color, bills sponsored by women of color will be more likely to advance than if the chair is a white woman.

Hypothesis 3. When the chair of the committee is a woman, women's issue bills sponsored by women will be more likely to advance out of the committee than when the chair is a man.

3a. When the committee chair is a woman of color, women's issue bills sponsored by women of color will be more likely to advance than if the chair is a white woman.

### Potential For Backlash

Despite these hypotheses, there is also reason to believe that having a female committee chair would result in backlash in which women's issue bills or bills sponsored by women would not fare any better, and might even become less likely to advance out of committee. Evidence for

this response begins in committee discussion, where women were more likely to be interrupted during discussions of women's issues, especially when the gender composition of the committee included a higher proportion of women (Kathlene 1994). If these examples of increased visibility elicit this type of response, then a woman as chair could be subject to similar reactions that would limit her ability to use the position as she might like to. Donald Haider-Markel explored another type of backlash against LGBT legislators, where he found that at the same time that the number of openly LGBT legislators in state legislature increased, so did the number of anti-LGBT bills both introduced and passed. Haider-Markel argues that increased salience of LGBT issues through increased representation could be the causal mechanism to this backlash. While women's representation is often measured differently in that women's issue bills are typically delineated by topic rather than stance (a bill need not take a feminist position to be considered a women's issue bill), the content will still impact a bill's chance at passage. If, for example, having women in leadership increases the number of anti-feminist bills that are introduced, but doesn't make them more likely to pass, then the number of women's issue bills overall will increase, but their rate of passage won't.

Finally, there is the question of how much power the chairperson position really has in altering gendered practices. Using traditional conceptions of power, we assume that this position comes with heightened influence and ability to insert one's own values into the functioning of the committee. However, recalling Weldon's feminist conception of power stipulating that certain identities and intersections of identities will command more status whether they intend to exert it or not, it is possible that even the designated position of chair would not counterbalance these dynamics (Weldon 2019). It is hard to imagine that some of the barriers in access and disrespect from colleagues experienced especially by women of color in legislatures, for example, would

subside simply by virtue of holding a leadership position (Hawkesworth 2003). The fact that women tend to approach chairperson positions differently is further indication that their influence over the committee would not be the same as what we would expect from a white male chair (Kathlene 1994).

## Data and Methods

### Data

Using the race and gender of the chair as the primary independent variable and bill advancement as a dependent variable, I test these hypotheses through a cross-sectional study of 13 committees within American state legislatures. Focusing at the state level provides a variety of advantages. First, this scale allows me to compare committees of the same jurisdiction at the same point in time, which is important given that not all committees will see the same proportion of women's issue bills. If a committee is likely to deliberate over either mostly or very few women's issue bills by virtue of its jurisdiction, then the impact of having a female chair on the advancement of women's issue bills might not be so great. In choosing a cross-sectional study, I also control for time, which in turn controls for the national political environment. Considering that wider views around gender and leadership may have shifted, it would be difficult to account for the way in which current events or attitudes in a given term or point in time would make women's issues more salient. It is also possible that one state would see more women's issue bills than another (a higher rate of maternal mortality in one area, for example, might warrant more bills on maternal healthcare). However, I attempt to mitigate these factors by controlling for state in my analysis. Furthermore, rather than focusing on only one committee or legislature, a cross-sectional approach allows for greater generalization of results given that the data is spread over multiple settings, and includes more cases overall.

## Defining Women's Issues

To classify which bills fall into the category of "women's issue" bills, I focus on topics that tend to be more salient to or have a greater impact on women and girls.. In the past, scholars have used a variety of criteria to delineate these issues, including the rate at which women either in a legislature or the general public express interest in an issue relative to men, the salience of a particular topic to the position or role women have historically occupied in society, or the reception an issue or viewpoint receives from groups who position themselves as women's interest groups (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2016). Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer find that among 19 focus areas included in their study, women are more likely to sponsor bills under topics of "Civil Rights & Liberties; Education; Health; Housing & Community Development; Labor, Employment & Immigration; and Law, Crime & Family" (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2016). However, many of these subject areas carry gendered associations beyond the identity of their primary sponsors, making it difficult to rely on a correlation between women's issues and bill sponsorship by women as the sole, defining trait of a women's issue bill. In fact, separating the two can help us to better understand whether it is the subject matter that causes these bills to face stricter scrutiny, their sponsors, or both.

Given that my study focuses on the committee level, using a definition that includes subject areas overlapping in some cases with the entire jurisdiction of my committees of interest would limit my ability to distinguish between the fate of women's issue bills and non-women's issue bills in these committees. Therefore, I consider definitions both for how committees are gendered, and how individual bills become classified as women's issue bills. This topic-based conception of women's issues would suggest that committees whose entire jurisdiction is education, health, or family and children could be gendered as more feminine committees

compared to appropriation, taxation, or defense. A study of women's cabinet appointments worldwide further elaborates that the distinction between these types of portfolios also lies in the divide between the public and private spheres (Krook and O'Brien 2012). In their research, Krook and O'Brien classify these feminine portfolios as such given their connection to the home and family, as well as the fact that they have been more closely associated with women. Given these historical and societal connections, committees under these jurisdictions will be more likely to be gendered as feminine in common conception and association.

When it comes to defining women's issues within these committees, I use a similar logic to determine bills that are more salient to or explicitly intended to relate to women primarily, which could also be referred to as women's interest bills. These might relate more specifically to sex discrimination, sexual assault or harrasment, reproductive health or education, or Title IX (Reingold 2020). Conversely, bills within feminine committees that focus more on taxation, finance, or higher education might be less associated with this narrower conception of women's interests, and therefore not classified as "women's interest" bills. Compared to the more general women's issue topics, it is also worth noting that some of these issues, such as maternal health, will disproportionately impact women of color, and intersect more generally with Black or Latinx issue bills. For this reason, we might expect the presence of men of color, both in a committee and as chair, to advance women's interest bills through this mechanism (Reingold 2020). Furthermore, because of this overlap, women of color are more likely to sponsor bills that address issues at the intersection of race and gender, such as health, education, and welfare (Reingold 2020). To ensure that my conception of women's issues is reflective of the intersectional lens of my study, I include bills especially in education committees that relate to

children's welfare and youth services, such as those focused on school lunches or other similar programs, that are at the intersection of race and gender issues.

### Sample and Independent Variable

In selecting the committees to focus on in my study, I seek to match as best as possible on factors of jurisdiction, year, partisanship, diversity within the committee overall, and chamber level. Using these criteria, I narrow down sets of four states in which one committee chair of the same jurisdiction falls into each of the four race and gender groupings of white man, man of color, white woman, and woman of color. In this study, people of color will include those who are identified as Black, Asian, Latinx, and/or indigenous American.

My sample includes 13 total committees, with four under each of the jurisdictions of judiciary and appropriations, and five committees focused on education. It was my initial intention to include four of each, but as the number of bills per committee varies by state and education committees tend to see fewer bills than both appropriations and judiciary committees, I include a fifth education committee to increase the number of observations in this category. These jurisdictions were selected partially based on availability, as most states have a committee for each of these topics, allowing me to form sets of states with diverse chairs in these positions. Furthermore, these three choices represent one committee typically gendered as more feminine (Education), one as more masculine (Appropriations), and one mixed (Judiciary). A committee like judiciary that will see a variety of topics lends itself to studying how those that fall under the women's issue category fare compared to those that don't. For committees like education or appropriations, however, it is still valuable to explore whether a committee gendered more towards or away from women's issues might make that committee more or less sensitive to a female chair. Keeping in mind that men on committees that focus on women's issues are already

more likely to sponsor women's issue bills themselves (Barnello and Bratton 2007), we might expect that these committees would be more receptive to increased discussion of these topics in the first place.

I compile most of my sample using datasets already compiled of state legislative committee leadership in 25 states between 1997 and 2007, which already over-samples more diverse states, more likely to have more diverse legislatures (Reingold 2024). The most recent year in the dataset for which I was able to form mostly complete sets of at least one state with a chair from each race and gender identity that also matched on the other criteria of chamber level and partisanship was 2005. Seeking to keep chamber level consistent, I looked only for committees in the lower chamber of their legislatures as the lower chambers seemed more diverse, giving more options to match committees. In order to control for the partisanship of the committee, I focus only on states with Democratic majorities and Democratic committee leaders, as there was not enough diversity among Republican committee leaders to generate enough matching cases to study. While this choice might reduce generalizability to bipartisan or Republican controlled environments, it also addresses potential confounding variables, as partisanship will greatly impact a legislator's voting behavior regardless of identity. Furthermore, I ensure none of the committee chairs in my study also held party or chamber leadership positions in the same year so that there would be no question of the influence that position might carry compared to the committee leadership.

For some committee jurisdictions and race/gender identities, there is only one chair within the data set that also fits the other criteria, including Rick Miera in the New Mexico House of Representatives' Education committee, or Patricia Lantz in Washington's Judiciary committee. For cases where there is more than one chair in the data set who could match on the

other criteria, such as white men chairing committees of any of the three jurisdictions, I use a few criteria to determine which I include. Initially and where all else was equal, I looked at further information on the race and gender composition of the committee to pick the state that matched best with the others already in the study. Additionally, I considered the number of bills introduced into these committees to ensure that my quantity of data points is both sufficient and manageable. In California, I found that the bills advanced out of committee at too high a rate to observe varied patterns in advancement. Because I only discovered this issue in the later stages of data collection, I replaced the two California committees in my sample with other committees for which I already had legislator demographic data rather than searching outside of my existing dataset, despite these committees being from different years or sessions. New Jersey elects its legislature in odd years rather than even; as such, I used the year 2006 rather than 2005 so that the bills I observed would still have been introduced in the first year of the session rather than the second. The other committee from an alternate year was New Hampshire's 2007 education committee, which I include to supplement for the small number of bills introduced in Nevada's 2005 education committee.

As indicated in Table 1, there is no woman of color chairing a judiciary committee in a lower chamber 2005 within this data set. To identify the remaining judiciary committee for my sample, I targeted states outside of the data set that also have higher racial diversity, which will likely correlate to higher racial diversity in their legislatures. Using legislative manuals or blue books to find information on committee leaders, I then referenced the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) for demographic information to find a judiciary committee in 2005 whose chair was a woman of color. Hawaii fit this criterion as well as my criteria for partisanship and other state or committee level factors. For all bill sponsors in Hawaii, as well as any

legislators in other states that I did not already have complete demographic information for, I cross referenced state legislative journals, CAWP's database on women elected officials, and the National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac from 2005-2006 to find the necessary gender, racial, and partisanship data.

Committee Jurisdiction	State	Year	Chair	Race/Gender Identity	Committee Size	% Female	%Nonwhite	%Women of color	%Democrat
Education	AR	2005	Joyce Elliott	Woman of color	19	26.3	15.76	10.5	78.9
Education	NM	2005	Rick Miera	Man of color	13	61.59	38.48	30.79	53.8
Education	NV*	2005	Bonnie Parnell	White woman	10	20	30	0	60
Education	NH***	2007	Emma Rous	White woman	20	65	5	5	60
Education	TN*	2005	Leslie Winningham	White man	14	28.54	42.8	21.4	50
Judiciary	HI**	2005	Sylvia Luke	Woman of color	10	40	60	30	80
Judiciary	NM*	2005	Joseph Cervantes	Man of color	11	36.39	45.49	9.09	63.7
Judiciary	WA	2005	Patricia Lantz	White woman	9	11.1	0	0	66.7
Judiciary	TN*	2005	Joe Fowlkes	White man	11	27.29	9.09	9.09	63.6
Appropriations	NJ***	2006	Nellie Pou	Woman of color	13	23.09	15.38	7.69	69.2
Appropriations	NM	2005	Henry Saavedra	Man of color	18	33.3	44.4	11.1	61.1
Appropriations	WA*	2005	Helen Sommers	White woman	29	44.85	3.45	3.45	58.6
Appropriations	MD*	2005	Norman Conway	White man	25	36	28	12	72

Table 1. Committees Included in Study.

\*More than one possible option in data set; committee selected based on demographic matching and data availability

\*\*Not found in data set; I collected member demographic data separately using the HI 2005 House Journal, the National APA Political Almanac 2005/2006, and the CAWP

\*\*\*Expanded sample to additional years due to lack of availability or variability in data for the states originally chosen

Dependent Variable

The unit of analysis for this study is the individual bill, while the dependent variable is whether it advanced to consideration by the full legislature or not. For each bill that is assigned to the selected committees during the relevant legislative session, I code for three sets of information: the race and gender of the sponsor, the issue focus of the bill (whether or not it is a women's issue bill), and its advancement or not out of the committee. In cases where a bill had multiple sponsors, I include only the first sponsor listed, as sponsor lists are not alphabetical, and this sponsor generally has the largest hand in developing and guiding the legislation through to passage (Bucchianeri, Volden, and Wiseman 2025). Using datasets of bills in state legislatures (Reingold, Haynie, Widner 2021), I was able to sort for bills that were considered by committees in New Mexico, Nevada, Tennessee, and Washington. For all other committees, I used a keyword search for committee names within a given state in the NexisUni legislative database to compile my bills of interest. Relying on summaries and bill histories within bill tracking reports in NexisUni, I then coded for advancement, women's issue, and women specific (a smaller subset of women's issues) bills for all 3437 bills in my study. Advancement and bill topic were both binary variables coded as 0 or 1 (advanced or did not advance, women's issue or not, etc.). This method of sorting the bills helped to capture the most relevant information, as using only a keyword search for certain topics might end up returning bills that contain the search words, but not as a main focus. Women's interest bills were all those that included the topics outlined above, whereas women specific bills explicitly mentioned women, girls, sex, or gender. I collected data on both to offer more flexibility in analysis, but did not end up using the data on women specific bills as there were not enough in each committee to conduct a full analysis. I also did not include bills that were sponsored by either committees or county delegations, as data on the county delegation demographics was more difficult to find. After compiling this information on my bills

of interest, I then used RStudio to merge the sponsor characteristics of gender, race, partisanship, whether they held a chamber or party leadership position to each bill, and years of state legislative experience, filling in additional data from state legislative archives as necessary.

To conduct analysis, I ran OLS regression models in RStudio for each hypothesis and subhypothesis. For most hypotheses, my primary independent variable of interest was the interaction between the chair identity and some combination of factors relating to the bill, such as the sponsor's gender and/or race, and whether it was a women's issue bill. In some cases, I ran the model on only a subset of the data that was relevant to that particular question. For Hypothesis 3, I focused on women's issue bills, comparing the interactions of chair identity and characteristics of the sponsor on these bills specifically. I also included control variables for the committee jurisdiction with the appropriations committee as the excluded variable, and for committee demographics and partisanship, sponsor race, partisanship, leadership positions, and seniority.

## Findings

All of the models I used in analysis can be represented by the following equation structure:

$$y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_1x_2 + \sum b_nz_n$$

In each case, the  $b_1$  coefficient relates to the gender and or race of the chair, the  $b_2$  coefficient relates to my secondary variable of interest (women's issue bill or sponsor gender and or race). The  $b_3$  coefficient relates to the interaction variable, representing cases where both the primary and secondary variables of interest are true (ex. the committee chair is female and the bill is a women's issue bill). Finally, the equation for each individual model will include all control

variables ( $z_n$ ) relevant to that model. The standard errors are clustered by state in all cases.

**Table 2. Impact Of Chair Gender On Advancement For Women's Issue Bills**

	Dependent Variable: Advanced					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Woman Chair	0.038 (0.073)	0.028 (0.095)	0.100* (0.054)	0.031 (0.063)	0.097** (0.045)	0.543*** (0.066)
Women's Issue Bill	-0.047 (0.092)	-0.047 (0.078)	-0.023 (0.082)	-0.039 (0.088)	-0.018 (0.066)	-0.007 (0.077)
Committee: Education		0.303** (0.139)			0.211*** (0.077)	0.258*** (0.010)
Committee: Judiciary		0.180* (0.095)			0.228*** (0.079)	0.428*** (0.017)
Committee %Female			0.007 (0.005)		0.007** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.0002)
Committee %Democrat			-0.006* (0.003)		-0.008* (0.004)	-0.013*** (0.002)
State (Controlled)						✓
Sponsor Party: Republican				-0.147*** (0.034)	-0.178*** (0.024)	-0.138*** (0.023)
Sponsor Committee Chair				0.145*** (0.024)	0.096*** (0.029)	0.075*** (0.027)
Sponsor In Leadership				-0.032 (0.031)	-0.028 (0.035)	0.002 (0.033)
Sponsor Seniority				0.00001 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)
Woman Chair x Women's Issue Bill	0.024 (0.100)	0.005 (0.079)	0.009 (0.094)	0.024 (0.102)	-0.005 (0.081)	-0.016 (0.089)
Constant	0.374*** (0.055)	0.250*** (0.033)	0.464* (0.254)	0.413*** (0.044)	0.523* (0.302)	0.459*** (0.106)
N	3,431	3,431	3,431	3,304	3,304	3,304
R <sup>2</sup>	0.002	0.063	0.044	0.024	0.118	0.158
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.002	0.061	0.043	0.022	0.116	0.153
Residual Std. Error	0.486 (df = 3427)	0.471 (df = 3425)	0.476 (df = 3425)	0.481 (df = 3296)	0.458 (df = 3292)	0.448 (df = 3285)
F Statistic	2.737** (df = 3; 3427)	45.809*** (df = 5; 3425)	31.688*** (df = 5; 3425)	11.412*** (df = 7; 3296)	40.215*** (df = 11; 3292)	34.214*** (df = 18; 3285)

\* p < .1; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .01

Hypotheses 1 and 1a:

Interaction Between Chair  
Identity and Women's  
Issue Bills

In Hypothesis 1, I

predicted that when the

chair of the committee is

a woman, women's issue

bills will be more likely to

advance out of the

committee than when the

chair is a man, and

furthermore, in

Hypothesis 1a, that

women's interest bills will

be more likely to advance

out of committee as long as the chair is not a white man. Table 2 shows the results of models pertaining to Hypothesis 1. In all models, being a women's issue bill in a committee chaired by a man was correlated with a slightly lower rate of passage, although these results were not statistically significant. Comparatively, women's issue bills in committees chaired by women were associated with a slightly higher passage rate in models one, two, and three, though this effect disappeared with the inclusion of more control variables together in models five and six,

and was not statistically significant. Given that there is little difference between the effect of a bill being a women's issue bill introduced into a committee with a male chair and being a women's issue bill introduced into a committee with a female chair, and that neither of these variables were statistically significant compared to many control variables that were, it is

**Table 3. Impact of Chair Race and Gender On Advancement of Women's Issue Bills**

	Dependent Variable: Advanced					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
White Male Chair	-0.156*** (0.034)	-0.179** (0.073)	-0.135*** (0.049)	-0.150*** (0.043)	-0.186*** (0.068)	-0.361*** (0.025)
Women's Issue Bill	-0.043 (0.027)	-0.063** (0.029)	-0.025 (0.025)	-0.027 (0.026)	-0.032 (0.024)	-0.039* (0.022)
Committee: Education		0.312** (0.128)			0.259*** (0.055)	0.294*** (0.003)
Committee: Judiciary		0.199** (0.094)			0.255*** (0.078)	0.405*** (0.008)
Committee %Female			0.007 (0.005)		0.006** (0.002)	0.010*** (0.0001)
Committee %Non White			-0.001 (0.001)		-0.003** (0.001)	0.001*** (0.0002)
Committee %Democrat			-0.003 (0.002)		-0.005** (0.002)	-0.005*** (0.0002)
State (Controlled)						✓
Sponsor Party: Republican				-0.134*** (0.035)	-0.163*** (0.023)	-0.137*** (0.024)
Sponsor: Committee Chair				0.157***	0.088***	0.075***
Sponsor In Leadership				-0.048 (0.031)	-0.015 (0.035)	0.002 (0.033)
Sponsor Seniority				0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)
White Male Chair x Women's Issue Bill	0.065 (0.123)	0.100 (0.120)	0.045 (0.122)	0.048 (0.122)	0.075 (0.115)	0.071 (0.118)
Constant	0.429*** (0.028)	0.298*** (0.052)	0.441 (0.285)	0.454*** (0.026)	0.524*** (0.184)	0.291*** (0.020)
N	3,431	3,431	3,431	3,304	3,304	3,304
R <sup>2</sup>	0.019	0.085	0.049	0.038	0.136	0.158
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.018	0.084	0.048	0.036	0.132	0.154
Residual Std. Error	0.482 (df = 3427)	0.466 (df = 3425)	0.475 (df = 3424)	0.478 (df = 3296)	0.453 (df = 3291)	0.448 (df = 3285)
F Statistic	22.053*** (df = 3; 3427)	63.791*** (df = 5; 3425)	29.521*** (df = 6; 3424)	18.776*** (df = 7; 3296)	42.992*** (df = 12; 3291)	34.335*** (df = 18; 3285)

\* p < .1; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .01

unlikely that the gender of the chair has a strong impact on passage for women's issue bills. As such, my data fails to support Hypothesis 1. The most significant result in the data related to this hypothesis, although not directly related to the hypothesis itself, was that bills overall were more likely to advance in committees with a female chair. Comparatively, therefore, no difference among women's issue bills may still suggest that women's issue bills fare

slightly worse in these committees.

Table 3 examines the likelihood of advancement for women's issue bills through the lens of both race and gender of the chair. It suggests that the chair being a white man is associated with a slight increase in the chance of passage for women's issue bills, contradicting my prediction in Hypothesis 1a. Women's issue bills in committees not chaired by white men were less likely to pass compared to non-women's issue bills, but the statistical significance for these results remained low (as well as lower than the effects of many control variables), and was only present in models two and six. The rationale for Hypothesis 1a was that there will be overlap between women's interests and the interests of other marginalized groups, especially pertaining to child and social welfare. This overlap, however, may have been less pronounced within my data because of the committee jurisdictions I chose: women's issue bills in the Judiciary and Appropriations committees often related to the criminalization of sexual assault, harassment, and sexual or domestic violence in Judiciary committees, and funding for shelters or other victim resources in the Appropriations committee, which are all topics more specific to women. Therefore, the assumption behind the hypothesis may not hold. It is also worth noting that within committees chaired by white men, women's issue bills were more likely to pass than non-women's issue bills. Again, this result may be a reflection of the content of the bills, assuming that a vote against enhancing protections against violence and assault would reflect poorly on a representative in most cases. Conversely, if there is backlash against increasing diversity in leadership in other committees, then the advantage these bills have might not hold, as the data indicates.

#### Hypotheses 2 and 2a: Interaction Between Chair Identity and Sponsor Identity

Hypothesis 2, as shown in Table 4, focused on the gender of the sponsor, and predicted that bills sponsored by women will be more likely to advance in committees with a female chair.

The results on the variables of interest were, again, not statistically significant. For models 5 and 6 which included the most control variables, bills sponsored by women in committees with a female chair were marginally less likely to advance than in committees with a male chair. In

**Table 4. Impact of Chair Gender on Advancement For Bills Sponsored By Women**

	Dependent Variable: Advanced					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Woman Chair	0.012 (0.070)	0.024 (0.063)	0.008 (0.088)	0.081 (0.056)	0.106** (0.041)	0.526*** (0.045)
Woman Sponsor	0.027 (0.044)	0.034 (0.033)	0.046 (0.042)	0.018 (0.033)	0.044* (0.024)	0.030 (0.023)
Sponsor Party: Republican		-0.142*** (0.033)			-0.175*** (0.022)	-0.135*** (0.024)
Sponsor Committee Chair		0.133*** (0.026)			0.103*** (0.030)	0.076*** (0.029)
Sponsor in Leadership		-0.033 (0.031)			-0.031 (0.034)	-0.0003 (0.032)
Sponsor Seniority		0.0003 (0.003)			-0.0004 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)
Committee: Education			0.303** (0.141)		0.213*** (0.078)	0.262*** (0.004)
Committee: Judiciary			0.181* (0.093)		0.230*** (0.077)	0.426*** (0.011)
Committee %Female				0.008* (0.005)	0.007** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.0002)
Committee %Democrat				-0.005 (0.003)	-0.008* (0.004)	-0.012*** (0.001)
State (Controlled)						✓
Woman Chair x Woman Sponsor	0.075 (0.049)	0.031 (0.042)	0.050 (0.057)	0.028 (0.031)	-0.036 (0.039)	-0.008 (0.035)
Constant	0.363*** (0.054)	0.397*** (0.043)	0.233*** (0.035)	0.387 (0.256)	0.511* (0.299)	0.414*** (0.055)
N	3,325	3,306	3,325	3,325	3,306	3,306
R <sup>2</sup>	0.005	0.025	0.065	0.049	0.119	0.158
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.004	0.023	0.064	0.048	0.116	0.153
Residual Std. Error	0.485 (df = 3321)	0.481 (df = 3298)	0.470 (df = 3319)	0.474 (df = 3319)	0.457 (df = 3294)	0.448 (df = 3287)
F Statistic	5.607*** (df = 3; 3321)	12.007*** (df = 7; 3298)	46.127*** (df = 5; 3319)	34.355*** (df = 5; 3319)	40.364*** (df = 11; 3294)	34.275*** (df = 18; 3287)

\* p < .1; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .01

accepting the null hypothesis here, we might speculate that the potential for backlash against female chairs outlined above is occurring. Under this theory, the position of chairperson does not offer women greater ability to reduce barriers for other women to see their bills advance, as they might face harsher discrimination due to the increased visibility and power. Alternatively, they at least do not wield the position in this way either due to fear of backlash or differences in

leadership styles that may be present regardless.

In Table 5, however, we do see statistically significant results when considering both the race and gender of the sponsor. Looking only at committees with women chairs, these models

compare the impact of the race of the chair (women of color vs. white women) on bill advancement. Foremost, in committees chaired by women of color, bills sponsored by women of color were much more likely to pass compared to bills sponsored by both white women and white men. They were marginally more likely to pass than bills sponsored by men of color,

though this result was not statistically significant. As such, we can accept Hypothesis 2a, and extend it to argue that the impact of a chair being a woman of color compared to a white woman benefits men of color, as well. Based on these results, we see that any institutional access white women are able to gain from having a white woman in a chair position does not extend to women of color.

It is also notable that bills sponsored by men of color are slightly more likely to advance from committees chaired by women of color, but to a much smaller degree. That the control variable for the Education committee was statistically significant, but not the Judiciary committee, seems to

**Table 5. Impact of Chair Race on Advancement For Bills Sponsored By Women of Color In Committees Chaired By Women**

	Dependent Variable: Advanced					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Woman of Color Chair	0.054 (0.072)	0.078 (0.075)	0.013 (0.056)	-0.136 (0.112)	-0.172* (0.091)	-0.172* (0.091)
Sponsor: White Man	0.044 (0.067)	0.097 (0.070)	0.022 (0.077)	0.013 (0.069)	0.114 (0.072)	0.114 (0.072)
Sponsor: Man of Color	-0.095 (0.064)	-0.134* (0.071)	-0.128* (0.069)	-0.128* (0.075)	-0.111 (0.073)	-0.111 (0.073)
Sponsor: White Woman	0.119* (0.066)	0.128* (0.065)	0.093 (0.076)	0.091 (0.069)	0.131* (0.070)	0.131* (0.070)
Sponsor Party: Republican		-0.227*** (0.038)			-0.190*** (0.048)	-0.190*** (0.048)
Sponsor: Committee Chair		0.028 (0.050)			0.008 (0.040)	0.008 (0.040)
Sponsor In Leadership		-0.060 (0.047)			0.019 (0.031)	0.019 (0.031)
Sponsor Seniority		0.001 (0.002)			0.002* (0.001)	0.002* (0.001)
Committee: Education			0.164*** (0.058)		0.102*** (0.014)	0.102*** (0.014)
Committee: Judiciary			0.036 (0.037)		-0.146*** (0.024)	-0.146*** (0.024)
Committee %Female				0.001 (0.002)	-0.002*** (0.0004)	-0.002*** (0.0004)
Committee %Non White				-0.003 (0.003)	0.001* (0.0004)	0.001* (0.0004)
Committee %Democrat				0.016** (0.008)	0.015*** (0.002)	0.015*** (0.002)
State (Controlled)						✓
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: White Man	-0.236*** (0.082)	-0.267*** (0.093)	-0.204** (0.088)	-0.183** (0.080)	-0.273*** (0.082)	-0.273*** (0.082)
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: Man of Color	0.030 (0.083)	0.043 (0.093)	0.091 (0.067)	0.085 (0.083)	0.040 (0.082)	0.040 (0.082)
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: White Woman	-0.320*** (0.122)	-0.312** (0.127)	-0.284*** (0.098)	-0.276*** (0.089)	-0.300*** (0.101)	-0.300*** (0.101)
Constant	0.429*** (0.057)	0.467*** (0.064)	0.405*** (0.062)	-0.524 (0.482)	-0.435*** (0.144)	-0.435*** (0.144)
N	1,270	1,266	1,270	1,270	1,266	1,266
R <sup>2</sup>	0.039	0.067	0.054	0.050	0.086	0.086
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.033	0.058	0.047	0.042	0.074	0.074
Residual Std. Error	0.483 (df = 1262)	0.477 (df = 1254)	0.479 (df = 1260)	0.481 (df = 1259)	0.473 (df = 1249)	0.473 (df = 1249)
F Statistic	7.239*** (df = 7; 1262)	8.132*** (df = 11; 1254)	8.016*** (df = 9; 1260)	6.600*** (df = 10; 1259)	7.337*** (df = 16; 1249)	7.337*** (df = 16; 1249)

\* p < .1; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .01

support my theory related to Hypothesis 1a that women's interests there would overlap more with those of other groups compared to Judiciary or Appropriations committees. These bills were more likely to overlap generally with welfare issues, as they included support for children such as programs that provide school lunches or after-school care.

Hypotheses 3 and 3a: Interaction Between Chair Identity and Sponsor Identity For Women's Issue Bills

**Table 6. Impact of Chair Gender On Advancement For Women's Issue Bills Sponsored By Women**

	Dependent Variable: Advanced					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Woman Chair	0.030 (0.084)	0.053 (0.108)	0.009 (0.078)	0.179** (0.084)	0.138** (0.058)	0.869*** (0.153)
Woman Sponsor	0.057 (0.058)	0.060 (0.041)	0.079 (0.052)	0.049 (0.043)	0.060 (0.039)	0.069 (0.047)
Sponsor Party: Republican		-0.038 (0.055)			-0.110*** (0.041)	-0.111** (0.047)
Sponsor Committee Chair		0.061 (0.144)			-0.065 (0.131)	-0.083 (0.127)
Sponsor in Leadership		-0.060 (0.080)			-0.006 (0.076)	0.037 (0.079)
Sponsor Seniority		0.0002 (0.004)			-0.001 (0.005)	0.002 (0.005)
Committee: Education			0.402*** (0.108)		0.328*** (0.094)	0.243*** (0.051)
Committee: Judiciary			0.247** (0.108)		0.302*** (0.086)	0.570*** (0.026)
Committee %Female				0.002 (0.004)	0.003 (0.003)	0.011*** (0.0003)
Committee %Democrat				-0.015*** (0.004)	-0.014*** (0.004)	-0.029*** (0.005) ✓
State (Controlled)						
Woman Chair x Woman Sponsor	0.081 (0.081)	0.071 (0.063)	0.052 (0.087)	0.010 (0.053)	-0.010 (0.071)	-0.024 (0.075)
Constant	0.313*** (0.073)	0.334*** (0.108)	0.136** (0.061)	1.189*** (0.285)	0.970*** (0.277)	1.392*** (0.326)
N	396	395	396	396	395	395
R <sup>2</sup>	0.013	0.015	0.115	0.068	0.163	0.203
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.005	-0.002	0.104	0.056	0.139	0.165
Residual Std. Error	0.477 (df = 392)	0.480 (df = 387)	0.453 (df = 390)	0.465 (df = 390)	0.445 (df = 383)	0.438 (df = 376)
F Statistic	1.671 (df = 3; 392)	0.867 (df = 7; 387)	10.168*** (df = 5; 390)	5.701*** (df = 5; 390)	6.764*** (df = 11; 383)	5.335*** (df = 18; 376)

\* p < .1; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .01

Hypotheses 3 and 3a

and their corresponding models resemble Hypotheses 2 and 2a in structure, but focus only on the subset of the complete data that were women's issue bills. In these hypotheses, I examine whether bills that are both a women's issue bill and have a female sponsor are more likely to advance when the committee chair is a woman, and whether women's issue bills sponsored by women of

color are more likely to advance when the committee chair is a woman of color compared to a white woman. Like for Hypothesis 2a, I created another subset of data containing only women's

**Table 7. Impact of Chair Race on Advancement For Women's Issue Bills Sponsored By Women of Color In Committees Chaired By Women**

	Dependent Variable: Advanced					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Woman of Color Chair	0.300*** (0.063)	0.338*** (0.045)	0.330*** (0.039)	0.306 (0.187)	0.022 (0.122)	0.022 (0.122)
Sponsor: White Man	0.526*** (0.069)	0.419*** (0.150)	0.497*** (0.071)	0.515*** (0.060)	0.466*** (0.130)	0.466*** (0.130)
Sponsor: Man of Color	0.250** (0.099)	0.141 (0.107)	0.222 (0.171)	0.248* (0.141)	0.174 (0.146)	0.174 (0.146)
Sponsor: White Woman	0.621*** (0.068)	0.580*** (0.095)	0.580*** (0.018)	0.615*** (0.048)	0.584*** (0.093)	0.584*** (0.093)
Sponsor Party: Republican		-0.048 (0.095)			-0.019 (0.106)	-0.019 (0.106)
Sponsor: Committee Chair		-0.293*** (0.093)			-0.275*** (0.077)	-0.275*** (0.077)
Sponsor In Leadership		-0.195 (0.159)			-0.088 (0.198)	-0.088 (0.198)
Sponsor Seniority		0.008*** (0.002)			0.009*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.003)
Committee: Education			0.198*** (0.053)		0.041 (0.066)	0.041 (0.066)
Committee: Judiciary			-0.086** (0.037)		-0.322*** (0.054)	-0.322*** (0.054)
Committee %Female				-0.0003 (0.004)	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)
Committee %Non White				-0.003 (0.005)	0.002 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)
Committee %Democrat				0.006 (0.015)	0.022*** (0.004)	0.022*** (0.004)
State (Controlled)						✓
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: White Man	-0.558*** (0.076)	-0.575*** (0.133)	-0.615*** (0.095)	-0.601*** (0.085)	-0.676*** (0.149)	-0.676*** (0.149)
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: Man of Color	-0.200* (0.110)	-0.217* (0.119)	-0.134 (0.175)	-0.183 (0.139)	-0.226 (0.159)	-0.226 (0.159)
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: White Woman	-0.587*** (0.141)	-0.621*** (0.223)	-0.559*** (0.130)	-0.594*** (0.128)	-0.628*** (0.224)	-0.628*** (0.224)
Constant	-0.000 (0.00000)	0.138 (0.151)	-0.000	-0.344 (0.942)	-1.116*** (0.431)	-1.116*** (0.431)
N	156	156	156	156	156	156
R <sup>2</sup>	0.079	0.116	0.119	0.085	0.147	0.147
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.035	0.049	0.064	0.022	0.049	0.049
Residual Std. Error	0.481 (df = 148)	0.477 (df = 144)	0.474 (df = 146)	0.484 (df = 145)	0.478 (df = 139)	0.478 (df = 139)
F Statistic	1.802* (df = 7; 148)	1.722* (df = 11; 144)	2.181** (df = 9; 146)	1.350 (df = 10; 145)	1.495 (df = 16; 139)	1.495 (df = 16; 139)

\* p < .1; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .01

issue bills in committees chaired by women to analyze Hypothesis 3a.

For Hypothesis 3, the results in Table 6 show little difference from Hypothesis 2, indicating that among women's issue bills, the chair and sponsor gender do not impact the likelihood of a bill's advancement any more than they do for bills at large.

When considering the intersection of both race and gender for women's issue bills, the trends from Hypothesis 2a hold, and become more pronounced. As seen in Table 7, bills sponsored by women of color become even more likely to pass in committees chaired by women of

color compared to those sponsored by both white women and men. The gap in likelihood of advancement depending on the race of the chair narrows between women's issue bills sponsored by women of color and women's issue bills sponsored by men of color. Though this study only

designates bills as women's issue or women specific, this observation may call for further analysis of bills by subject area to see how women's issues may overlap with other group interests, and how the effect of these overlaps may moderate their likelihood of advancement.

## Logistic Regression Models

**Table 8. Logistic Regression Models For All Hypotheses**

	Dependent Variable: Advanced					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Chair: Female	1.934*** (0.403)		1.865*** (0.295)		4.886*** (0.969)	
Chair: White Man		-1.585*** (0.134)				
Women's Issue Bill	-0.030 (0.406)	-0.175 (0.108)				
Sponsor: Female			0.155 (0.118)		0.445** (0.179)	
Chair: Woman of Color				-0.853* (0.476)	12.330*** (1.047)	
Sponsor: White Man				0.528 (0.325)	14.359*** (0.770)	
Sponsor: Man of Color				-0.461 (0.326)	13.036*** (1.364)	
Sponsor: White Woman				0.567* (0.298)	14.902*** (0.814)	
Committee: Education	1.369*** (0.056)	1.441*** (0.021)	1.385*** (0.017)	0.469*** (0.124)	1.323*** (0.264)	0.228 (0.318)
Committee: Judiciary	1.910*** (0.104)	1.865*** (0.051)	1.898*** (0.075)	-0.667*** (0.151)	3.280*** (0.199)	-1.441*** (0.207)
Committee %Female	0.046*** (0.001)	0.048*** (0.001)	0.046*** (0.001)	-0.006** (0.002)	0.062*** (0.002)	-0.021*** (0.003)
Committee %Nonwhite		0.003** (0.001)		0.003 (0.002)		0.007 (0.009)
Committee %Democrat	-0.040*** (0.013)	-0.024*** (0.001)	-0.037*** (0.008)	0.073*** (0.015)	-0.160*** (0.032)	0.100*** (0.019)
State (Controlled)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Woman Chair x Woman Sponsor			-0.087 (0.166)		-0.257 (0.319)	
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: White man				-1.253*** (0.387)	-15.323*** (0.965)	
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: Man of Color				0.160 (0.348)	-13.193*** (1.352)	
Woman of Color Chair x Sponsor: White Woman				-1.360*** (0.479)	-15.027*** (1.214)	
Sponsor Party: Republican	-0.713*** (0.126)	-0.708*** (0.129)	-0.699*** (0.130)	-0.944*** (0.328)	-0.562** (0.283)	-0.120 (0.484)
Sponsor: Committee Chair	0.332** (0.118)	0.331*** (0.119)	0.345*** (0.128)	0.004 (0.157)	-0.460 (0.583)	-1.411** (0.692)
Sponsor in Leadership	0.028* (0.159)	0.028 (0.157)	0.018 (0.156)	0.117 (0.182)	0.257 (0.463)	-0.447 (0.913)
Sponsor Seniority	0.010 (0.015)	0.010 (0.015)	0.011 (0.015)	0.009 (0.006)	0.008 (0.026)	0.045*** (0.014)
Woman Chair x Women's Issue Bill	-0.068 (0.456)					
White Male Chair x Women's Issue Bill		0.340 (0.577)				
Constant	-1.274* (0.657)	-0.817*** (0.115)	-1.509*** (0.360)	-4.563*** (0.874)	4.862** (1.976)	-19.395*** (1.366)
N	3,304	3,304	3,306	1,266	395	156
Log Likelihood	-1,928.807	-1,927.944	-1,929.880	-796.222	-211.584	-92.219
AIC	3,895.615	3,893.888	3,897.759	1,626.444	461.167	218.437

\* p < .1; \*\* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .01

To confirm the results above, I ran the final model in each table through logistic regression as seen in Table 8.

In almost all cases including all of the first four hypotheses, the direction of the relationship and level of significance remained the same. For Hypothesis 3 and 3a, the coefficients were much more extreme.

Furthermore, the results for women's issue bills sponsored by women in committees chaired by men and women's issue bills sponsored by men of color regardless of the chair's race became statistically significant where they had not been under the OLS models. Finally, in Model 6, the logistic regression showed much less similarity between bills sponsored by

women of color and men of color, with bills sponsored by men of color advancing at rates much more similar to those by white women and white men. To test these last two hypotheses, I used only a subset of my data, splitting it first into only women's issue bills, and then only women's issue bills in committees chaired by women. The reduced sample size for these hypotheses may help to account for why there was more variance for these models, but not the others.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This study was concerned with the impact of the interaction of three main variables, the identity of the chair, the focus of a bill on women's issues, and the identity of the sponsor, on the likelihood that a bill advances out of committee. While the results of my single-axis hypotheses suggest that there is little difference in impact between male and female chairs on advancement rates for women's issue bills and bills sponsored by women, race was a significant differentiating factor among female chairs in determining the success of these bills. Furthermore, the similarity in overall advancement rates between women's issue bills and non-women's issue bills, as well as between bills sponsored by men and women, diverges from the results of previous studies. Additional research might trace these trends across time and settings to discover where these results hold, and when shifts occur. This research does, however, speak to the necessity of an intersectional approach when considering the role gender plays both in determining legislative outcomes and the experiences of individuals within legislatures. As seen here, further studies must also examine the intersections of gender and race, or else risk generating results that are not generalizable across all women.

As discussed in my theories, backlash against expanding diversity may account for the observations that chair identity makes a difference only under limited conditions. It is possible that factors such as increased interruptions throughout discussion or different approaches to the

position would moderate the power of women as chairs to influence committee proceedings in ways that improve institutional access both for other women and for women's issues. However, if women of color are able to successfully wield the chair position in ways that expand access for other women of color, then it is also possible that gender alone is not enough of a unifying characteristic to generate these outcomes. In other words, race may be more important than gender in these environments, such that the barriers women of color (and men of color) face in passing their legislation remain in place even with white women as committee chairs.

That bills sponsored by men of color fared more similarly compared to those sponsored by women of color across committees chaired by women than did bills sponsored by white women suggests that in these legislatures, affinity and networks of support are stronger across the single axis of race than they are across gender. Further evidence for these trends exists in the control variables for committee demographics, where having a higher percentage of women on the committee was positively associated with bill advancement except when the independent variable in question was the race of the chair. In these cases, higher percentages of both women and people of color were negatively associated with advancement, suggesting that despite the positive impact that having a co-identifying chair has for women of color as sponsors, additional backlash against increasing power exists where it likely does not for white women.

Data availability factored greatly into my choices of committee, and jurisdictions included in my sample may have influenced the types of women's issue bills I collected, which may, in turn, have impacted their chance of advancement. While the Judiciary committee fits the profile of being more neutral or mixed in terms of how its bills are gendered, the types of women's issue bills in this committee are overwhelmingly related to sexual and domestic violence. These topics might be more likely to mobilize support from women across both racial

identity and political ideology, and be more difficult to take a vote against than other women's issues. Though there were not enough observations of the "women specific" variable I coded for to include it in analysis for each hypothesis, it is notable that 65.7% of women's issue bills in the Judiciary committees overlapped with the women specific bills compared to 46.8% in the Appropriations committee and only 25.3% in the Education committee. Given that the topics of women's issue bills within some of these committees may intersect more or less with interests specific to other groups based on race or race and gender, further research on the committee advancement rates for different types of women's issue bills would be useful to expand upon the results of this study. A larger sample size would also allow for stronger analyzation of trends across different committee jurisdictions.

Partisanship is another factor worthy of further consideration, especially given that these findings relate only to committees where Democrats have a majority. Notably, two out of the three committees chaired by white men are in the Tennessee legislature, where Democrats had a majority in the lower chamber but not the upper chamber. If members of these committees have different expectations about the types of bills that will have a strong chance at passing into law after advancing out of committee, then this difference may impact committee advancement, as well. Beyond the impacts of partisanship differences for generalization across committees in my study, there are also implications for generalization to bipartisan and Republican controlled environments. These settings are often less diverse, but also may respond differently to increases in diversity, so further research could focus more closely on the way that partisan identity interacts with gender and racial identity when it comes to leadership and its impacts in legislative arenas. Notably, the percentage of Democrats on the committee was almost always a significant control variable, but differed in direction and strength of impact across the various models.

Finally, although this study may be able to observe differences (or lack thereof) in advancement rates of bills out of committee, different methods would be necessary to definitively conclude that null results are a sign that institutions have changed, and there are no barriers to bill advancement along the single axis of gender. Because women who run for office and who win are more likely to have higher qualifications (Fox and Lawless 2004), seeing no difference between advancement rates for bills sponsored by men and bills sponsored by women instead could still indicate the opposite, as we would expect that a group of legislators that is on the whole more qualified would be able to pass a higher share of the bills they sponsor. Rather, to understand exactly what these similarities are telling us, we would need to return to measures of behavior such as who speaks most, who speaks earliest in discussion, or who is able to frame further conversation on key topics. Assuming that a group that is privileged within an institution would only widely change these types of behaviors as a response to shifting norms, we might also examine whether male legislators take up any different strategies in response to more diverse leadership. Though harder to track, measures that tie more directly to individual legislators would be more effective in tracking any changes in institutional norms, and in confirming any relationship between changes in raced and gendered norms and changes in bill advancement.

Ultimately, institutional power and potential shifts in who is able to access it are difficult to measure. As diversity increases both in legislatures as a whole as well as in their leadership, it is important to understand how these changes can, in turn, impact the legislatures themselves, lowering barriers for those who have historically been excluded. The results of my intersectional hypotheses suggest that legislative outcomes may be an effective proxy for measuring the impact leadership has on outcomes related to these barriers in some cases, even if it cannot describe how

changes are occurring. At the same time, there might still be other commonalities in the way women lead across races that aren't captured by measuring bill advancement. As this study demonstrates, however, increases in descriptive representation even within positions of power may not translate into increases in influence for groups as a whole, and especially not for those who are at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

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