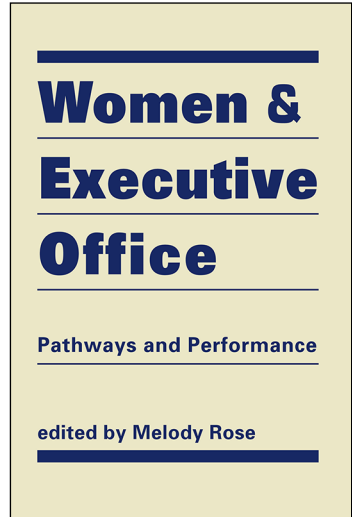


EXCERPTED FROM

Women and Executive Office:
Pathways and Performance

edited by
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ISBNs: 978-1-58826-851-8 hc



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Lynne Rienner Publishers website
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1

Women as Executive Political Leaders

Melody Rose

THE 2008 CANDIDACIES OF HILLARY CLINTON AND SARAH PALIN brought into sharp relief the fact that the United States is among a shrinking list of nations that has never elected a female chief executive. The rapid advancement of political women in both legislative and executive capacities across the globe has increasingly challenged US pride of place in the advancement of female politicians generally, but the obvious absence of a female US president is particularly noticeable. The United States ranks roughly 70th among nations in its inclusion of women in its national legislature, while it has become increasingly common across Latin America and Europe for nations to elect a female chief executive. Throughout the world, women have been advancing at record speed in the assumption of executive leadership positions in nations both democratic and autocratic, leaving the United States, the “land of the free,” in the unenviable position of having to explain the inexplicable: why no female US president.

A generation of scholarship dedicated to the study of legislative women has advanced our understanding and placed special focus on the barriers, opportunities, and pathways for women who seek those positions (Burrell 1994; Dodson 2006; O’Connor 2001; Reingold 2008; C. S. Rosenthal 1998, 2002; Rosenthal and Peters 2010; Swers 2002; Thomas 1994). Aided by a larger “*n*” factor, scholars of women’s legislative leadership have taken the lead in understanding advancement of US women in the political arena. It is time to bring the same descriptive focus and holistic assessment to the study of executive women. In this volume, we pay particular attention to women’s paths toward executive political roles in the United States and the barriers they face en route.

But what does it mean to be an “executive” woman? In this book we deliberately take an inclusive approach to that definition, both by including subnational positions and by expanding the list of “executive” jobs in the national arena. Namely, we consider the *traditional* executive positions to be mayor, governor, and vice president/president. We augment that list with the *unconventional* executive roles of presidential administrative appointee and Speaker of the House. These roles have characteristics similar to those on the traditional list and have been added here in order to advance working knowledge of the range of challenges and opportunities of women in executive functions and the paths women take to executive office.

For the purposes of this volume, executive roles are defined as having five common features. First, these roles uniquely feature solitude. Executive leaders are very frequently an “only,” in which individual action is often exercised and personal responsibility is paramount. In contrast, in a legislative role, individual officeholders have many—sometimes hundreds—of peers. That environment is often thought to be one that lends itself to collective action and collaboration, qualities routinely associated with typical female behavior.

The solitary quality of the executive role is related to the second common feature of executive positions: often, as the “only,” a female executive falls under greater external scrutiny that is inherently gendered, and her gender may be incongruous with the public’s expectations of the office. The singular image of the executive striking out alone (or the “great man” model of leadership; see Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995) may simply be incongruent with gender stereotypes (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993).

Third, an executive typically sits atop a broad organizational structure. “Political executives usually sit at the apex of some hierarchy and are looked at as the top official in charge of their respective organizations” (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995, 307). Certainly this is true for House Speakers and cabinet-level appointees, who manage sizable and complex organizations. Along with this internal management requirement, the executive has an analogous external role, often functioning as a liaison to other branches of government. While the rank-and-file congressperson plays no such role, the Speaker of the House certainly does.

Fourth, these roles tend to be reactionary in nature: they frequently respond to policies developed within a legislative body, by either implementing, rejecting, or adjudicating their suitability. While the *traditional* executives may figuratively be agenda setters, they can rarely create policy through initiation. The *unconventional* executives chosen for study here fall into the same boat.

Finally, as opposed to legislative figures, executives are policy generalists, responding to a wide range of policy initiatives created elsewhere. For example, whereas the legislator or council member can drill down into

the finer points of environmental policy, developing expertise in ports and waterways or nonvehicular transportation, the executive would find herself confronting all manner of environmental policy considerations.

These five characteristics are common across the studies offered here, and they begin to define for the reader our scope of inquiry and rationale. We also deliberately insist on subnational study in this work. Many women have served as mayor or governor, and their impact and roles are overdue for careful scholarship. However, the authors of this volume inherit certain methodological challenges that will become apparent to the reader. Namely, though the large number of individuals serving in mayoral positions in particular does provide ample and rich data, those data are not always easily accessed, as our authors explain in the chapters that follow. These methodological challenges have in the past made gender-focused mayoral explorations untenable areas of study, and our emphasis here on that office breaks new intellectual and methodological ground. It also elevates our understanding of female politicians to include these understudied roles and provides necessary and exciting findings about diversity and inclusion to the field of women and politics.

Of course prior efforts have been made to understand and interpret the role of women in or running for executive offices, but those efforts have been at times fractured and not as numerous as studies of legislative women. Due to the work of Borrelli (2002), Borrelli and Martin (1997), Clift and Brazaitis (2003), J. Dolan (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004), Falk (2010), K. Ferguson (1985), Han and Heldman (2007), Martin (2003), and Watson and Gordon (2003), we have begun to think about the nexus of executive leadership and the participation—or absence—of women within it. Still, the lion's share of this foundational literature is focused on national executive office and, even more specifically, the bureaucracy. One of the objectives of this volume is to lay bare the diversity of executive office itself and the varied roles women have played within different levels and types of executive service.

Beyond this foundational literature, efforts also have been made to examine particular barriers to executive office, such as media coverage (Bystrom et al. 2004). Given the disparity in coverage across executive offices, not surprisingly these studies, too, are focused largely on the national level. And given the small “*n*” problem of women running for the US presidency, these studies tend to focus on one (Carroll 2009; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Lawrence and Rose 2010) or a few (Falk 2010) candidates.

Mayoral and gubernatorial studies rarely include a gender lens, and the larger “*n*” poses different methodological challenges. Few women have served as governor (34 at the time of this writing), and nearly half of the states have never elected a woman governor. The literature in this field is emergent, due to the growing and recent expansion of women into this

statewide office; here, the field often focuses on the rhetoric of women governors (Marshall and Mayhead 2000) or case study analysis of specific female governors' experiences (Madsen 2009). A recent addition to this literature is the autobiography of former governor Barbara Roberts (D-OR), only the third female governor in US history to have penned her own story (after Madeleine Kunin [D-VT] and Sarah Palin [R-AK]) (Roberts 2011). A few other volumes offer analysis of a particular female governor (Ferguson and Paulissen 1995; Scheer 2005) but, due to limited cases, cannot generalize the nexus between gender and the office of governor.

Alternatively, due to the obvious plethora of opportunities, many more women have served as mayors. But few scholars have used gender analysis to study them. One early effort was by Grace Hall Saltzstein (1986), who measured the impact of female mayors in opening doors for women in city jobs. We build upon this early work and discover that female mayors have made inroads, and that women of color in particular are advancing through mayoral positions.

Intellectual Contributions

Beyond defining the realm of executive women as a distinct scope of research within women and politics, this volume represents a number of contributions to the field's methodology and theory. A wide variety of methods are represented here: ethnographic explorations of women's narratives, word cloud representation of keyword frequencies, elegant statistical analyses, and content analyses provide a snapshot of the sophistication and array of methods available in contemporary women and politics studies, and we hope that this field will continue to break new methodological ground.

A variety of substantive theoretical concepts are challenged in the course of this book, and I hope as editor of the volume that these challenges will be met with additional research and that a dialogue around women in executive roles will grow. For example, one critical challenge offered by several of the authors here is to the widely used concept of the political "pipeline" for women politicians. Women, we often argue, will advance to national executive leadership by flooding the path to advancement at the local level. Here, however, we are confronted with certain assumptions about women's interest in national office as well as the assumption that national office ascends naturally from local service. Pei-te Lien and Katie Swain, in Chapter 8, critique that assumption, however, arguing that women of color in particular may view local service as the ultimate achievement in political advancement; when we overlook this perspective, we may inadvertently essentialize female political leadership and fundamentally misunderstand female ambition. For instance, as Susan Carroll and Kira Sanbonmatsu point

out, mayoral studies can allow us to embrace a far more holistic picture of women's leadership successes (see Chapter 7).

Additionally, this book considers in a variety of ways *how* women come to seek executive office: What is the role of financial viability, the political party, and personal networks? To what degree are pathways to executive service distinct from legislative office, and what do these various executive posts have in common? Understanding how women decide to run and appreciating all the factors that effectively enhance or prevent executive office seeking in the United States is critical to untangling the puzzle of "why no woman president." We must also consider why the dearth of women executives extends beyond the White House to other executive offices. Women are not faring much better in local executive office than in the nation's capital.

A number of our authors find that it requires advanced research and new thinking to learn how women come into their executive roles. Perhaps because voters in the United States generally don't associate women with the qualities of executive leadership (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995; Heldman 2007), how women manage to assume these roles at all is of great concern. Implicit in the book is the argument that women will find diverse pathways to executive office and that a more advanced conceptualization of gender will be required for future studies. Because media continues to be a nuanced and critical source of difficulty (see Chapters 3 and 9), female candidates will likely approach running through a variety of different "models of adaptation" (see Chapters 2 and 4). Even considering campaign requirements as fundamental as finance and political party support, we discover that women candidates can be enormously resourceful and creative in establishing their viability, in ways that are often unexpected (see Chapters 6, 10, and 11).

One of the continuous themes of the book is the enduring importance of male influence in executive offices. Whether by inhibiting or encouraging their female partners' interest in leadership (see Chapter 8), or by maintaining an essential role in nominating and advancing women through the executive branch (see Chapter 5), men must be part of the study of women's advancement in political office. New to this line of inquiry is research regarding the role of the male partner and gender politics in national executive elections; a male partner presents a particular challenge for female presidential candidates in ways that had not been fully appreciated before the 2008 election (see Chapter 12).

Of course, no volume such as this can be exhaustive. While we have attempted here to survey the opportunities and challenges for women in a variety of executive posts, and in so doing have expanded the definition of "executive" pathways, we have necessarily left some stones unturned. Due to the limits of space and time, this volume does not address every state-level

executive role; the job of attorney general, for instance, also falls within the scope of our executive definition but is not included here. Similarly, we are unable to accommodate consideration of heads of agencies, secretaries of labor or education, and other state- and local-level executive roles. Within our executive agencies chapter, we restrict our thinking to cabinet and White House staff (see Chapter 5), knowing that more can be said of career bureaucrats in future research. We hope that this volume will inspire scholars to think more holistically about women and executive office as a discrete area of study and that future scholarship will help fill the gaps left here.

Organization of the Book

The chapters in this book fall into three natural sections. Part 1, “The Federal Level,” is dedicated to an examination of women in a variety of national, twenty-first-century executive positions; here our examination extends to both traditional and unconventional roles to include the presidency and vice presidency as well as the House speakership and presidential appointees. The purpose of this section is to investigate national executive pathways in the United States and to learn how women have or have not sought and served in those roles. Here we can explore some interoffice comparisons and contrasts and define some offices as executive that may not usually be considered. Part 1 begins with Regina G. Lawrence and Melody Rose, who examine the ways in which women candidates run for highly masculinized executive offices—in this case, the US presidency and vice presidency—and conclude that female candidates develop “modes of adaptation” for success and must employ a clear gender strategy (see Chapter 2). From here we consider the vice presidency more fully in Chapter 3 with Kim L. Fridkin, Jill Carle, and Gina Serignese Woodall’s study of the media’s coverage of 2008 vice presidential candidates Sarah Palin and Joe Biden. Given the significant role of media in national campaigns, candidate message and news media coverage develop a disconnect that harms women’s efforts to reach national service, a trend investigated in this chapter. In Chapter 4, Cindy Simon Rosenthal and Ronald M. Peters Jr. broaden our understanding of executive office through an examination of the House speakership: using the earlier work of Mary Parker Follett, Rosenthal and Peters examine Nancy Pelosi’s particular brand of leadership at the top of the legislative branch to argue that the position is rightly considered executive in function. Chapter 5 rounds out this first section of the book with Julie Dolan’s analysis of the Obama administration’s record of inclusion through the appointment process and the significance of women’s leadership of the federal bureaucracy.

Part 2, “The State and Local Levels,” explores the pathways for executive office holding at the subnational levels. Chapter 6 by Richard Herrera

and Karen Shafer, a study of female governors and their policy agendas, sheds new light on the impact of women in statewide executive posts. Chapter 7 follows, with Susan J. Carroll and Kira Sanbonmatsu's careful study of women's decisions to run for mayoral offices and their pathways to getting there. Building upon these themes and examining some popular assumptions regarding women's ambition for national office, Pei-te Lien and Katie E. O. Swain underscore the consideration of female mayors in Chapter 8, adding to the work of Carroll and Sanbonmatsu through a deep exploration of the experiences of female mayors of color, explicitly challenging the field's affinity for "pipeline" theory.

Part 3, "Challenges for Women Executives," explores contemporary barriers facing women who seek executive office. Chapter 9, by Dianne Bystrom, Narren Brown, and Megan Fiddelke, finds that newspaper coverage of female mayors and governors is different in quantity but similar in quality of coverage when tested against men in the same jobs: quite the opposite of Fridkin, Carle, and Serignese Woodall's findings on vice presidential coverage back in Chapter 3, which reminds the reader that although executive offices have certain commonalities, their dissimilarities are also compelling. Denise L. Baer considers the role of recruitment by political parties in women's advancement to executive office in Chapter 10 and finds that in contrast to other work on candidate emergence, high-level political activism is not gendered but that gender recruitment is both polarized and gendered, particularly for executive office seekers. Victoria A. Farrar-Myers and Brent D. Boyea reflect on the financing of the 2008 presidential election in Chapter 11, demonstrating both the essential role that finance plays in American elections at all levels and the multiple pathways that women pursue to establish financial viability. Finally, Chapter 12, by Kelly Dittmar, focuses our attention on one of the most insidious and neglected barriers to women's advancement in executive roles: the role of the traditional female spouse and the powerful gender politics that subtly require the successful candidate to have the support of such a "helpmate."

These final chapters offer a complex understanding of the particular challenges faced by twenty-first-century women in pursuit and governance of executive offices and the ways in which the twenty-first-century United States retains some deeply embedded norms and practices that create a misalignment between executive roles and female gender expectations. Certainly there is no one set of challenges for women seeking executive offices, nor should we assume women will forge a single path to success. Rather, the cumulative lesson is that women pursuing executive positions will be creative and strategic in overcoming obstacles and in defining success. We also discover that some progress has been made against these obstacles, and we offer those updates to the larger field of women and politics. The book concludes in Chapter 13 with an outline of what future research in this field might address and where the opportunities lie for better understanding.

Future Research

As stated at the outset of this introduction, much has been accomplished in the study of particular aspects of executive office. Still, the field of political science is overdue for an examination of women in executive offices and their opportunities and challenges in the twenty-first century. Until recently, data challenges prevented such inquiry: with no woman elected to the presidency and few who have occupied the governor's mansion, and with numbers hard to track at local levels, certain women's leadership pathways and experiences have fallen out of the storyline. Today, with larger sets of numbers, better data collection methods, and a growing appreciation for the need to expand our definition of "executive," we can bring focus to this line of inquiry and provide a 360-degree assessment of women in executive contexts in the United States. Still, these advancements indicate that we are really just beginning to define a course of study. The primary objective of this book is to establish a "state of the field" assessment of methodological advancements, theoretical conundrums, and conceptual challenges—and to identify areas for further research opportunities. While this work cannot claim to be definitive, we do hope it provides a spark for further inquiry.