

Gender and Governors' Policy Agendas

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Abstract

The rise of women governors is one of the most significant developments in U.S. politics in recent decades, one fraught with potential policy effects that have only recently begun to be explored. I study a crucial aspect of these potential effects, gubernatorial agenda setting, by testing the hypothesis drawn from the women and legislatures literature that male and female governors have different policy agendas. I use a governor's first State of the State address as an indicator of his or her policy agenda. My sample consists of the speeches of 50 governors (11 women and 39 men), one per state, delivered from 2001 to 2009. I use content analysis to determine the percentage of words in each speech related to two theoretically gendered policy areas, health and economic development, regressing this on gender, controlling for the governor's political party and the relevant problem, political and resource environments. I find that, contrary to a substantial literature on women in the legislature, that men and women governors do not differ in their policy agendas.

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The rise of women governors is one of the most significant developments in U.S. politics in recent decades, one fraught with potential policy effects that have only recently begun to be explored (Shafer and Herrera 2008). Since 1974, when Ella Grasso of Connecticut was the first woman to be elected governor in her own right, 25 women have done so (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2012). In the decade of the 2000s, there was a particular surge in women governors, with 11 elected from 2000 through 2008, and the trend continued in the 2010 election, with four more women elected governor then (CAWP, 2012). The governorship is, perhaps, the second most important job in U.S. politics today (Rosenthal 2012). Furthermore, since being governor can be a stepping stone to the White House, the rise of women governors has now put many women in the presidential pipeline (Watson 2003; Weir 2006). But aside from important representational effects (Thomas 2005), what effects might this seismic shift in women's gubernatorial success have? In particular, do female governors advance different policy agendas than do male governors?

This study looks at the potential effect of the rise of women governors in setting the policy agenda of state government, one of a governor's most important roles (Beyle and Ferguson 2008; Dometrius 1999). Gender theory and previous studies of women legislators provide strong reason to expect that women governors advance a different policy agenda than their male counterparts. Women and men differ in their socialization and life experiences in ways that lead them to have different policy priorities (Burrell 1994; Dodson 1998; Kathlene 2001; Poggione 2004; Saint-Germain 1989; Swers 2002; Thomas 2005, 1994).

Governors are expected to set the legislature's agenda and their priorities can have a major impact on policy (Rosenthal 1990). The governor's agenda reflects an assessment of the most important problems facing the state and proposals for solving them (Dometrius 1999). The

problems include perennial issues, some of which are beyond the governor's control (Kingdon 1995), but governors also have discretion in choosing the issues they will emphasize (Rosenthal 1990, 2012; Van Horn, Baumer, and Gormley 2001).

I test the hypothesis that female and male governors have different policy agendas by using a comparable and importation manifestation of a governor's agenda, his or her first State of the State address. My sample consists of the speeches of 50 governors, one per state, delivered from 2001 through 2009. It includes the universe of 11 women governors elected in the decade prior to the 2010 election. I use content analysis to determine the percentage of words of each speech related to two theoretically gendered policy areas, health and economic development, and then use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis to estimate the effect of gender on these aspects of a governor's agenda, controlling for the relevant problem, political, and resource environments.

I find that, unlike with state legislators, male and female governors do not have systematically different policy priorities, other things being equal, even in these very gendered policy areas. I explain this by the fact that governors are more constrained by the institution in which they serve than are legislators, with more limited space on their policy agenda for their own issues (Ferguson 2006). This suggests that while the rise of women governors may have important symbolic representational effects in American politics, its substantive impacts on policy may be less than expected (Carroll 2001a; Kunin 2008).

Gender Differences in Policy Agendas

Why would we expect male and female governors' policy agendas to differ? First, differences in men and women arise from differences between male and female cultural sex role socialization, gender identity formation, and subsequent life experiences that lead to different

approaches to human relationships and moral decision making (Gilligan 1982). While seeing gender as a simple dichotomy in sex characteristics can ignore diversity and exaggerate commonalities among women and men (Kenney 2008; McBride-Stetson 2004; Cammisa and Reingold 2004), there is evidence that male and female legislators differ in their psychological attitudes and approaches to policy making, including gender differences in the kinds of issues they believe should be addressed by public policy (Kathlene 1989, 1995, 2001). Women tend to have a more contextual orientation, defining problems in terms of an interdependent community, while men tend to have a more instrumental orientation, seeing problems in terms of individual rights and responsibility (Kathlene 1989, 2001).

Scholars have found that female lawmakers, both in state legislatures and in Congress, are more likely than their male counterparts to give priority to issues dealing with women, children and families (Burrell 1994; Carroll 2001b; Swers 2002; Thomas 1991, 1994; Wolbrecht 2002) and to take more liberal positions on such issues (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Poggione 2004). This does not mean women legislators care only about these issues, but they do devote more time and effort to them than do men, and they represent areas of women's distinctive expertise (Thomas 1994). On the other hand, men lawmakers commit proportionately more effort to business issues, considered their area of expertise (Ibid.). These gendered priorities and expertise are reflected in public opinion, too. People hold gender stereotypes about the policy issues that candidates for office are most capable of handling (Oxley and Fox 2004). Health care, education, and welfare are perceived to be areas of female policy competence, while the economy, law enforcement, defense, and terrorism are thought of as areas of male competence (Dolan 2010; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a). Interestingly, people who view women as competent to handle stereotypical male issues such as the economy are also more willing to

support their election (Dolan 2010). To the extent that governors and legislators are alike as policymakers, I expect that gender ought to have an impact on governors' policy agendas, as well.

But how specifically might male and female governors' agendas differ? Some policy areas have been found to be more gendered – that is, to show more differences across gender lines – than others. For example, health policy is an area where women officeholders are thought to have more interest than do men (Carroll 2001b; Conway, Ahern, and Steuernagel 1999; CAWP 1991; Dolan 2010; Thomas 1994). Of course, health care is a core policy area of state government responsibility and one of the perennial issues that all governors face (Bowling and Ferguson 2001; Donovan, Mooney, and Smith 2011; Herzik 1991; Willoughby 2011). The proportion of state revenues spent on Medicaid, the federally-matched program that pays for health care for low-income persons, has been growing to the point it now represents the largest item in most state budgets (Gray et al. 2009). In the decade of the 2000s, governors could be expected to include health care and health finance in their agendas because states were experimenting with health care reforms, like universal coverage plans and financing reforms, trying to deal with the growing number of people without health insurance and the federal government's failure to lead on the issue (Greer and Jacobson 2010).

But gender may affect a governor's emphasis on health care policy. This policy area has traditionally been seen by voters as the province of women (Dolan 2004; Fox and Oxley 2003; Lawless 2004), and legislators' priorities have been found to reflect these gender differences. Female legislators and members of Congress are more likely than their male counterparts to give top priority to legislation dealing with the provision and regulation of health care, including women's health concerns, and to devote a large proportion of their bills to it (Bratton and Haynie

1999; Carroll 2001b; Dodson 1998, 2001; Little, Dunn, and Deen 2001; Reingold 2000; Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas and Welch 1991). Given these findings among American legislators, I expect to find that female governors will rate health care policy higher on their agendas than do male governors.

Another policy area that is believed to be highly gendered – but in the opposite direction – is economic development policy. As with health care policy, economic development has always been a significant part of any governor’s job description, especially in recent decades (Teaford 2008). Governors have major responsibility for managing their state’s economy (Grady 1991) and they know voters will evaluate them according to its performance (Hansen 1999a). Governors are now “the preeminent economic boosters of their states” (Teaford 2008, 107). Governors pay attention to the economy because jobs and unemployment consistently rank as the top problems people see facing their states (Hansen 1999a). Since the 1970s, governors have stressed jobs and economic development in their State of the State addresses (Hansen 1999b). Economic development has become a prominent issue in these speeches, surpassing traditional priorities of education and transportation (Herzik 1991; Hansen 1999a). So it is reasonable to expect that all governors, regardless of gender, will give some priority to economic development in their policy agendas.

But one way that scholars have believed men and women to differ, both in and out of government, is in their respective attitudes toward business. Division of labor according to gender socialization has led people to view business and economic activities as the province of men, who operate in the public sphere, while the household is the realm of women, whose domestic responsibilities lie in the private sphere (Stivers 2002). These pervasive gender stereotypes carry over into politics where voters perceive men and women candidates as having

distinct areas of expertise (Fox and Oxley 2003; Woodall and Fridkin 2007). Men are rated as more competent to handle the economy, while women are viewed as more competent in handling compassion issues such as poverty, education, the environment, and health care

Legislators' priorities have been found to reflect these perceptions, with male legislators more likely to give priority to policy issues of business and finance, areas of society in which they have traditionally dominated (Thomas 1994; Thomas and Welch 1991). In one major study, fully two to three times as many men as women legislators took an active role in legislation related to commerce, finance, and agriculture, including policies related to economic development, budget and tax issues, and business and labor regulation (Reingold 2000). Therefore, I expect male governors to give greater priority to economic development issues than do women governors.

The nexus of health care and economic policy is in the area of health care finance. Health care spending has consumed an ever greater percentage of states' budgets over time, and increases in Medicaid costs and enrollment continue to strain these budgets (National Association of State Budget Officers [NASBO] 2008). Governors have sought to redesign their Medicaid programs to try to contain costs and improve efficiency, while also improving the health of participants, to make the programs sustainable (National Governors Association [NGA] 2008). In addition to Medicaid reform, governors confront a range of other complex health finance issues, such as the number of uninsured, insurance costs to employers, insurance regulation, state employee insurance plans, provider reimbursement, prescription drug costs, delivery of care in underserved areas, and home and community-based long term care (Weil 2010). Female governors may give health finance issues high priority in their policy agendas because they see them as involving state government's responsibility for the care of its citizens,

while male governors may give these issues high priority because they see them as involving state government's responsibility for managing the state budget and economy. Whichever force may be dominant here is an empirical question, the answer to which could tell us how the recently important area of health finance is perceived by policymakers – is it a health policy or an economic policy area?

Institutional Influences on Governors' Policy Agendas

In contrast to studies that have found that gender differences lead to different policy priorities, other work has found few, if any, significant differences between female and male public officials in their policy priorities and/or leadership styles, or at best, mixed evidence (King 1995; Reingold 2000, 2008; Tolleson-Rinehart 2001). The argument here is that institutional norms appear to influence both men and women and lessen gender differences in behavior. Most of this research has focused on state legislators and members of Congress. For example, both male and female state legislators tend to adopt feminine, cooperative approaches to power and leadership (Reingold 2000). In Congress, the norms of seniority, committee appointments, and majority/minority party status can limit female members' influence on women's issues (Swers 2002). The institution of the governorship could similarly influence governors, reducing gender differences in their policy agendas. Four potential processes could be at work in homogenizing governors' agendas: institutional constraints, adaptation, selection, and office transgending. One or more of these processes could lead to a lack of gender differences in the policy agendas of men and women governors.

The force of the *institutional constraints* of the governorship could limit a governor's freedom to choose the issues he or she will make a priority, thus limiting the effect of personal characteristics such as gender on the choice of priorities. Governors and legislators differ in their

institutional roles and responsibilities, with governors having less latitude to choose their priorities. Legislators are able to choose which policy areas to work on within the broad constraints of their constituents' preferences (Swers 2002a), whereas governors must consider the needs of a heterogeneous, statewide constituency. Governors must also consider perennial state needs, state and national political and economic trends, federal policies and mandates, and issues pressed by other institutional actors such as legislators, other statewide officers, political parties, interest groups, and public opinion (Dometrius 1999; Ferguson 2006; Gross 1991; Herzik 1991). As chief executives, governors are also held individually accountable by electorates for the conditions of their states and the effects of their policies, whereas legislative responsibility is widely diffused (Mayhew 1974). As opposed to governors, legislators can be "speakers" rather than "doers," making speeches, introducing bills, and taking credit for benefits for their districts. Thus, governors often have a smaller margin of their agenda in which they can elevate their own policy priorities.

A second reason there may be no gender differences in governors' policy agendas is the process of governors' *adaptation* to the gendered norms of the institution. The governorship is considered a "masculine" office (Oxley and Fox 2004), and men and women governors may not differ in their expressed policy agendas because women governors adapt their policy interests and priorities to the masculine-gendered norms of the governorship. "Institutional gendering" means the traditions, norms, and expectations of the political institutions in which officeholders serve exert pressure on them to conform (Duerst-Lahti 2005; Carroll and Dodson 1991). There is evidence that women governors adapt to the traditional political environment of the executive office and exhibit "power over" motivations as much as their male counterparts (Barth and Ferguson 2002). They understand the necessity to lead and exercise traditional male notions of

power over others, although they also couple that with a motivation to achieve certain goals for their leadership and empower others (Ibid.).

A third reason there may be no gender differences in governors' policy agendas is the process of *self- and/or other-selection* for the chief executive position. Women who seek the chief executive office may self-select for the job because of self-perceived qualifications that conform to masculine standards of the office and because they "think like men" (Fox and Oxley 2003). Voters, in turn, may choose women for executive positions based on stereotypes of the traits needed at the executive level – stereotypical masculine attributes of assertiveness, rationality and decisiveness (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a). Female candidates may be successful who are able to convey to voters that they possess masculine personality traits and the competence to handle issues in masculine policy domains such as the economy (Ibid.). Voters base their choice on candidates' personal characteristics and candidates decide to run based on personal, political ambition. As women consider running for office, their political ambition is tempered by the recognition that "most of these [political] institutions are dominated by men and ultimately embody a perpetually ingrained ethos of masculinity" (Lawless and Fox 2005, 9).

Finally, men and women governors' policy agendas may not differ because of the process *transgendering* of executive offices in recent years. That is, it is becoming appropriate for both men and women to hold chief executive roles and power, so that fewer gender differences in these roles exist (Borrelli 2002; Duerst-Lahti 1997).¹ As an increasing number of women assume visible positions of elite executive power, worldviews and agendas change so that gender no longer represents fixed opposites (Duerst-Lahti 1997). Ideological and behavioral differences

¹ According to Duerst-Lahti, the concept of "transgendered" is better than "gender neutral" in describing men and women occupying the same roles. Transgendered "implies that a biological male or female can cross past gender constructions and still be seen as appropriate, but it also implies that gender simultaneously continues to shape interpretations" of behavior (1997, 13).

between men and women increasingly reflect the individual more than gender categories.

Transgendering of executive offices means men and women are viewed as equally capable and are crossing traditional gender roles, with women now holding formerly exclusively masculine positions, such as U.S. secretary of state and attorney general (Borrelli 2002). Interestingly, some studies have found that it is not women who are acting more like men in either legislative, executive, or even judicial contexts in recent years, but men who are acting more like women (Whicker and Jewell 1998; Reingold 2000; Tolleson-Rinehart 2001; Turner and Breslin 2003). If the institution of the governorship is changing and becoming transgendered, so that both masculine and feminine areas of policy preference and expertise are common and expected of both male and female officeholders, this would lessen any effect of gender on governors' policy agendas.

In sum, mixed evidence from previous research concerning gender differences, both in the policy priorities of legislators and the effects of institutional norms on their behavior (Reingold 2000), suggests the possibility that there may be no difference in the policy priorities of female and male governors. Therefore, the second hypothesis this study tests is that gender has no effect on a governor's policy agenda.

Data and Methods

To test my hypotheses, I assess the impact of a governor's gender² on the priority he or she gives health and economic development policy in his or her policy agenda. A governor's agenda is a difficult thing to pin down, unlike, for example, legislative roll call votes. Also, surveys of sitting governors are impractical. The most accessible, comparable, and valid source

² I am using sex differences in behavior (agenda setting) as a proxy indicator of gender differences, following common practice in political science research (Swers, 2002). For the distinction between sex and gender, see McDermott and Hatemi, 2011; Duerst-Lahti and Kelly, 1995; and Tolleson-Rinehart, 2000.

of governors' policy agendas are their State of the State (SOS) addresses (Ferguson 2003; Ferguson and Barth 2002; Coffey 2005; Herzik 1991). In most states, governors are constitutionally required to report to their legislatures annually on the state of their states, and most do so in the form of an address to a joint session of the legislature at the beginning of the legislative session (Ferguson 2006; Weinberg 2010). The SOS address is comparable to the president's annual State of the Union address that serves as the vehicle for presenting the president's agenda of top priorities, and has long been used by scholars in this way (Cohen 1995; Light 1999). The SOS speech serves as the public and most complete statement of the governor's top policy priorities, and as such, it is useful in measuring the governor's agenda across time and across governors (DiLeo 1997; Ferguson 2003; Ferguson and Ostiek 1999; Herzik 1991; Kousser and Phillips 2010; Shafer and Herrera 2008; van Assendelft 1997; Willoughby 2011).

In particular, a governor's first SOS address is probably the purest statement of his or her policy agenda. Delivered near the beginning of his or her first term in office, this speech is the first official, public statement of his or her agenda as chief executive (Ferguson 2003). It is, perhaps, the clearest statement of a governor's political philosophy, priorities, and most significant policy proposals before the process of negotiation and compromise with the legislature begins (Kousser and Phillips 2010).³ Governors' inaugural and budget addresses are similar major set-piece speeches, but they are less useful for operationalizing their policy agendas. Inaugural addresses typically express broad themes and a vision of the future, but they do not detail an agenda or focus on specific policies (Rosenthal 1990). Budget addresses,

³While a governor may use a speechwriter, that person will reflect the governor's worldview and policies, and it is the governor who ultimately delivers the speech and personalizes the text (Ferguson and Barth 2002).

delivered later, focus on the primary functions and recurring demands of state government, and thus are less apt to reflect the governor's own policy preferences and preferred agenda. On the other hand, the SOS address is explicitly and almost exclusively policy focused. It is intended as the governor setting the agenda for the upcoming legislative session (Ferguson 2003, 2006).

Therefore, I operationalize a governor's policy agenda as the policy priorities he or she presents in his or her first State of the State address.

I develop a unique cross-sectional sample of SOS speeches for my analysis, consisting of the first SOS speeches of 50 governors (delivered after they were first elected or elected in their own right), one per state, who were elected in the decade of the 2000s (see Appendix A).⁴ I needed to include speeches for such a wide range of years to capture enough women governors to make valid comparisons and to have variation in political party affiliation.^{5,6} However, given that all these governors were elected in the same decade, the political contexts of these speeches are not so extremely different as if we were to assess all the women governors' SOS speeches since Grasso's in 1975. My sample includes the speeches of 11 women (seven Democrats, four

⁴ I obtained the speeches from the Pew Center on the States' website, Stateline.org, which maintains an electronic archive of nearly all U.S. governors' State of the State speeches since 2000. For practical reasons of accessibility of the data, I narrowed my study population to governors elected since 2000. I restricted the sample to one governor and speech per state to make the manual content analysis task manageable within time constraints.

⁵ I completed data collection for the study prior to the 2010 election in which four more women were elected governor.

⁶ In analysis not reported, I included a dummy variable for a governor's speech given in a recession/stagnation year to assess any year-specific effects on the priority he/she gave economic development. The estimated effect of this dummy was not statistically significant and none of my substantive conclusions was affected. The years 2001-2004 and 2008-2009 were years in which the national economy was in recession or stagnation (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-236, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2008*, 5, Washington, D.C., 2009).

Republicans), the universe of women elected governor from 2000 through 2008, and 39 men (21 Democrats, 18 Republicans).⁷

My dependent variables are the percentage of words in a governor's first SOS speech that pertain to the respective policy areas. A number of researchers in recent years have used content analysis of State of the State speeches to study various aspects of governors' attitudes, policy priorities, and budget initiatives (Coffey 2005; Ferguson 2003; Ferguson and Ostdiek 1999; Shafer and Herrera 2008; van Assendelft 1997). Hand-coding for the mentions of policy issues in governors' speeches is a standard approach used by researchers to identify governors' policy agendas (DiLeo 1997; Ferguson 2003; Ferguson and Barth 2002; Herzik 1991; van Assendelft 1997; Willoughby 2011). I use the total number of words of the speech as the base for calculating the percentage of words spent on a particular policy area.⁸ I developed a coding list empirically in reading these speeches, classifying words related to health care and health finance (Appendix B), and economic development (Appendix C).⁹ Words classified as *health care* are issues from the individual citizen's perspective, such as access and affordability of health care. Words classified as *health finance* are related to health costs from the state's perspective, such as controlling costs of health care and spending on Medicaid. Words classified as *economic*

⁷ This sample of SOS speeches averaged 3,959 words in length, though they ranged widely from 1,872 words to 10,732 words. The median length was 3,915 words. The average length of the speeches did not differ significantly between women governors (4,078 words) and men (3,926 words), nor between Democrats (3,785 words) and Republicans (4,181 words).

⁸ I do not attempt to identify ceremonial and other non-policy related words and subtract those from the total number of words of the text in calculating the percentage for each policy area because they were a minor part of the speech and common across speeches.

⁹ I conducted a reliability assessment of my manual content analysis procedures. I employed a University of Illinois Springfield graduate student to follow my coding instructions and procedures and to code six randomly selected speeches from among the speeches in my sample. She coded three speeches for health care and health finance, and three other speeches for economic development. We obtained similar results with few discrepancies. Since I did all the coding myself of the 50 speeches, I did not have inter-rater reliability problems.

development are related to economic growth, job creation and retention, workforce training, and business climate, for example.

I include four sets of control variables in the analyses: personal characteristics of the governor and characteristics of the political, problem and resource environments that may affect the priority a governor would give health or economic development policy (Nice 1994). The specific control variables in each model are factors relevant to the given policy area that previous studies have suggested could influence a governor's agenda.

In the model of governors' health care policy agendas, I control for the governor's political party affiliation (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 1998; Ferguson 2006; Gray et al. 2009; Miller 2005; Paul-Shaheen 1998; Poggione 2004; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002), the percentage of the state population age 65 or older the year the governor was elected (Miller 2005), the percentage of the state population in poverty (Miller 2005, 2006), a composite measure of the health status of the state population and state health care resources¹⁰ (Gray et al. 2009; Hanson, R. 1994; Miller 2005), party control of the legislature and divided government (Bowling and Ferguson 2001; Ferguson 2003; Gray, Lowery and Godwin 2007; Gray et al. 2009; Miller 2005; Swers 2002a; Tolbert and Steuernagel 2001), the percentage of women in the legislature (Thomas 1994), and party identification of the electorate (Crew 1992; Erikson, Wright and McIver 1993, 2006; Miller 2005, 2006; van Assendelft 1997). The health finance model control variables are largely the same except for the following. First, I also control for the resource environment by including state per capita Medicaid spending in the year the governor was elected and per capita personal income (Gray et al. 2009; Miller 2006). Second, I use the

¹⁰ United Health Foundation, America's Health Rankings, www.americashealthrankings.org

percentage of the state population eligible for Medicaid instead of the percentage in poverty since the former is more directly relevant to the state's obligation for health care finance.

In the economic development model, I control for the following characteristics of the governor: his or her political party affiliation (Brace 1993; Hansen 1999a; King and Cohen, 2005; Leyden and Borrelli 1995; Niemi, Bremer, and Heel 1999), education and career background in business (Burrell 1994; Ferguson 2006; Hamman 2004, Oxley and Fox 2004; Sanbonmatsu 2006a; Thomas and Welch 1991), and penultimate position in the private sector (Beyle and Ferguson 2008; Donovan, Mooney and Smith 2011). I control for the condition of the state's economy as indicated by the state unemployment rate in the year the governor was elected and change in the unemployment rate from the previous year (Crew 1992; Ferguson 2003; Leyden and Borrelli 1995; Niemi, Bremer, and Heel 1999), and state per capita personal income (Brace 1993, Hansen 1999a; Niemi, Bremer, and Heel 1999). I control for the trend in the national economy that could affect a state's economy and a governor's agenda by including the change in U.S. gross domestic product in the year the governor was elected (Brace 1993; Hansen 1999a). Descriptive statistics for the control variables are reported in Appendixes D and E.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 report the results of the estimation of the models of influences on the percentage of words that governors in my sample devoted to health care, health finance, and economic development in their first State of the State speeches. With regard to the central question of this paper, these models show no statistical evidence that a governor's gender influenced the priority he or she gave health care, health finance, or economic development in his or her policy agenda. Surprisingly, a governor's gender appears to have no impact on the

priority he or she gives even health care, a female-gendered policy area. This result holds up even when controlling for the governor's political party and indicators of the state's political, problem and resource environments related to health policy.¹¹ These results demonstrate that, while one individual-level characteristic did influence the priority given economic development in the policy agenda, whether a governor's last job was in the private sector, a governor's gender had no discernible effect at all.¹² Even though women governors devoted a lower median percentage of their speech to economic development (12.20 percent compared to 17.47 by male governors), as suggested by gender theory, once their personal characteristics were controlled for, there is no relationship between sex of the governor and the priority he or she places on economic development in his or her policy agenda.¹³

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Female and male governors devoted comparable percentages of their speeches to health care and health finance policy. Female governors devoted a median of 3.67 percent of their speech to health care compared to a median of 2.75 percent by male governors. Likewise, female governors devoted a median of 0.61 percent of their speech to health finance compared to 2.15

¹¹ I performed diagnostic tests to check that the regression models met the assumptions of ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation. I found no evidence of any major problems or violations of the OLS assumptions.

¹² The other gender-related factors do not appear to mute the effect of sex. I dropped them from the model and re-ran the regression analysis, just controlling for the problem environment. Without the three gender/business-related variables in the model (undergraduate or graduate major in business or economics, prior career experience in business, and penultimate position in the private sector), the unstandardized slope coefficient for governor's sex changed little and remained non-significant ($\hat{\beta}=2.31$, $t=.544$, $p=.29$). These factors could be considered "gender-related" in that women are less likely to have educational and career backgrounds in business than are men.

¹³ In fact, the slope coefficient is positive (female), though statistically indistinguishable from zero. In further analysis, when controlling for the effect of Governor Sarah Palin's speech (48.17 percent related to economic development), the sign of the coefficient for sex changes to negative (male).

percent by male governors.¹⁴ Beyond gender, the results in Table 1 show that governors' priorities in health care and finance are highly idiosyncratic. In the health care model, none of the control variables had a statistically significant slope coefficient. In the health finance model, political party of the governor and party identification of the electorate had a statistically significant estimated effect on the priority a governor gave this aspect of policy in his or her policy agenda. The coefficient of 2.693 ($p < .01$) for party of the governor (Democrat) means that, in this sample, a Democratic governor devoted an estimated 2.69 percentage points more words to health finance than did a Republican governor, on average and all things equal. This is a meaningful additional amount given that the mean for the sample overall was only 3.07 percent of the words of the speech devoted to health finance, with a range of 0.0 to 15.11 percent. On the other hand, the coefficient of -0.137 ($p < .05$) for Democratic advantage in party identification of the electorate means that, for each additional percentage point of Republican identifiers among the electorate, governors are estimated to devote 0.137 of a percentage point more words to health finance.¹⁵

However, both of these findings are explained by the special influence of the speech of Wyoming Governor Dave Fruedenthal, a Democrat. It contained by far the largest percentage of words devoted to health finance, 15.11 percent, compared to a median of 1.56 percent for this sample of governors' SOS speeches. Also, Wyoming had the second largest value on party identification, -31.33, indicating wide Republican identification among the state's electorate. In

¹⁴ Male governors devoted a higher mean percentage of their speech to health finance (3.41) compared to female governors (1.87), but the difference was not statistically significant ($t = -1.65$, $p = .11$).

¹⁵ This suggests that moving from the least to the most Republican identifiers, we would expect an increase of about 53 percent of the range of the amount of the speech devoted to health finance. Calculation: Percentage of health finance words in the speeches ranged from 0 to 15.11. Party ID – Democratic advantage ranged from -33.67 to 24.30, for a difference of 57.97. $57.97 \times .137$ percentage point = 7.942 divided by 15.11 = .526.

his 2003 SOS speech, Governor Freudenthal emphasized the need to address state employee health insurance costs and encouraged support for a health care commission to examine Medicaid and health care finance issues. When I re-estimated the model controlling for the Wyoming speech by including a dummy variable, the slope coefficients for both political party of the governor (1.792, $p=.06$) and Party ID of the electorate (-.028, $p=.37$) were no longer statistically significant. This is further evidence that gubernatorial agenda-setting is idiosyncratic.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The results of the health care and finance models are supported by those reported in Table 2, where the influences on the priority governors gave economic development in their initial policy agendas are modeled. As with the models in Table 1, this analysis shows that a governor's gender does not influence how much priority he or she gives economic development, once the influences of his or her political party, education and career experience related to business, and relevant characteristics of the state and U. S. economies are all controlled for. The only factors that appear to have influenced these governors' economic development policy agendas systematically were state per capita personal income and whether the governor's last job was in the private sector.

In performing diagnostics to test the robustness of the regression model and to check that it met the assumptions of ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation, I identified two influential cases: the speeches of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin (R), who devoted 48.2 percent of her first SOS speech to economic development, and North Dakota Governor John Hoeven (R), who devoted 58.3 percent of his speech to this. Both were far beyond the sample median of 14.8 percent. To assess whether these cases with extreme values on the dependent variable biased the

estimated effects of any of the independent variables, I created dummy variables for these two cases and re-estimated the model. Even controlling for the Alaska and North Dakota speeches, a governor's gender still had no effect on the percentage of the first SOS speech devoted to economic development ($\hat{\beta} = -.884$, $t = -.249$, $p = .402$). In controlling for these two speeches, whether a governor held a penultimate position in business no longer had a statistically significant effect (from $p = .038$ to $p = .202$), as North Dakota Governor Hoeven was a bank executive before being elected governor, while state per capita personal income still had a modest effect ($\hat{\beta} = -.001$, $t = -2.219$, $p = .016$). In poorer states, governors devoted more space in their policy agenda to economic development. Not surprisingly, when the economic situation of a state is better, a governor can devote more agenda space to other pressing issues. The point estimate in this model is that for every \$1,000 more in per capita personal income (PCPI) a state had the year a governor was elected, he or she devoted 1.0 percentage point fewer words to economic development in his or her first SOS speech.

Conclusion: The Non-effect of Gender on Governors' Policy Agendas

While the surge in women governors elected in the decade of the 2000s meant a big change in the descriptive representation of women, it appears that it did not make a difference in governors' policy agendas. In examining two policy areas that previous studies suggested would be the most likely to show a gender difference, health and economic development, I find no statistical evidence that gender influenced the priority that governors gave these areas in their initial policy agendas. Surprisingly, even in health care, a feminine-gendered policy area, a governor's sex did not have an impact on the priority he or she gave it. Likewise, a governor's gender also had no influence on how much priority he or she gave the male-gendered policy area

of economic development. These findings match the only previous study of gender effects on governors' policy agendas (Shafer and Herrera 2008).

In addition, I found that gender did not influence the priority governors gave health finance in their initial policy agendas. Since health is considered a feminine policy area and finance is considered a masculine area, which effect gender would have was an empirical question. But I find a governor's gender had no effect at all here. Eight of the 11 women governors in the sample mentioned their state's health care costs in their first SOS address; four mentioned the Medicaid program specifically.

So why does gender not affect a governor's agenda, even in these areas where we have good reason to expect it to do so, and even though we see this effect in legislators' priorities? Political institutions have an impact on the attitudes and behavior of the individuals who operate within them (Donovan, Mooney and Smith 2011). Institutional differences between the office of governor and the legislature mean governors face different norms and constraints in their choice of priorities than those faced by legislators. For example, managing the state's economy and economic development are among a governor's primary responsibilities, ones for which the voters hold the governor, more than the legislature, accountable (Grady 1991; Niemi, Stanley, and Vogel 1995; Carsey and Wright 1998; Hansen 1999a). So it is not surprising that a governor's gender does not affect the priority he or she gives economic development, nor health care finance, with its implications for the state's budget and economy.

My study of state executives complements Reingold's (2000) study of state legislators in which she found there are not clear and consistent gender differences in policy priorities and legislative behavior, but rather that institutional norms and constraints of the legislature appear to influence both men and women and lessen gender differences in behavior. The lack of gender

differences in governors' policy priorities that I find suggests a similar process at work. The *institutional constraints* of the governorship – wherein the governor's role and responsibilities prescribe much of his or her agenda, overriding individual policy preferences – could be the underlying cause. Whether these constraints are caused simply by something innate in the institution of the governorship, women governors' adaptation to or selection for the office, or the transgenerating of the office itself remains a question for future research.

In the end, my results suggest that beyond institutional constraints, governors' agendas are largely idiosyncratic. I created a liberal test of the gender hypothesis by selecting policy areas where I would most likely find a gender effect, but found none. I included in the models other, relevant individual characteristics of the governor, and characteristics of his or her state's political, problem, and resource environments that could affect his or her choice of agenda priorities, but very few of these factors had any effect, and once I controlled for cases with extreme values on the dependent variable, virtually none had an effect.

What do these results mean for the question of the impact of women governors on policy? I conclude that: 1) gender does not affect their policy agendas, 2) the institution of the governorship is probably the main influence on their agendas, and 3) the variations in agendas that remain after the institutional constraints are just idiosyncratic, reflecting personal interests.

Table 1. Influences on Governors' Policy Priorities: Health Care and Health Finance

Independent Variables	Health Care	Health Finance	Health Finance Controlling for WY Speech
Governor's characteristics			
Female governor	-.025 (1.377)	-1.294 (1.463)	-.952 (1.364)
Democratic governor	1.263 (1.098)	2.693** (1.163)	1.792 (1.135)
Problem environment			
State health score	-.010 (.068)	-.025 (.068)	-.026 (.063)
Percent age 65 or older	.526 (.417)	.104 (.448)	-.130 (.426)
Percent in poverty	-.007 (.259)		
Percent Medicaid eligible population		.094 (.186)	.022 (.175)
Political environment			
Percent women in legislature	.176 (.111)	-.024 (.127)	-.015 (.118)
Democratic control of legislature	.393 (.767)	-.108 (.854)	-.371 (.799)
Compound divided government	-.847 (1.579)	-.264 (.636)	.901 (1.565)
Simple divided government	-.372 (1.233)	.552 (1.297)	-.129 (1.233)
Party ID – Democratic advantage	-.019 (.065)	-.137* (.079)	-.028 (.085)
Resource environment			
Per capita Medicaid spending		.002 (.003)	.003 (.003)
Per capita personal income, constant 2000 \$'s		.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Influential case			
Wyoming Gov. Freudenthal (D)			10.644** (4.174)
Constant	-7.438 (7.729)	-7.516 (9.755)	1.027 (9.650)
R ²	.203	.256	.378
Adjusted R ²	-.019	-.007	.133
F (df 10,36) (12, 34) (13,33)	.915	.973	1.544
N	47 ¹	47	47

Dependent variables = percentage of words of first State of the State speech related to health care or health finance policy. Unstandardized slope coefficients from ordinary least squares regression analysis. Standard errors in parentheses. *p<.05, **p<.01 (I used a one tailed-test to test the directional hypothesis that the independent variable, gender, affects the dependent variable, percentage of the speech devoted to a selected policy area.)

¹ Missing cases are Nebraska, Alaska and Hawaii. Data for party control of the legislature and divided government omitted Nebraska which is unicameral and nonpartisan. Gallup Poll data for party identification of the electorate were not available at the state level for Alaska and Hawaii.

Table 2. Influences on Governors' Policy Priorities: Economic Development

Independent Variables	Economic Development	Controlling for AK and ND Speeches
Governor's characteristics		
Female governor	2.967 (4.456)	-.884 (3.555)
Democratic governor	-1.179 (3.718)	1.340 (2.924)
Undergraduate or graduate major in business or economics	-2.772 (4.561)	-5.271 (3.561)
Prior career experience in business	-2.375 (4.156)	-2.252 (3.397)
Penultimate position in private sector	10.967* (6.021)	4.425 (5.259)
Problem environment		
State unemployment rate in year elected	1.625 (1.833)	2.447 (1.606)
Change in unemployment rate from previous year	-3.996 (4.109)	-5.747* (3.384)
State per capita personal income (constant 2000 \$'s)	-.001* (.000)	-.001* (.000)
Percent change in U.S. real GDP in year elected	-1.134 (3.263)	-3.768 (2.685)
Influential cases		
Alaska Gov. Palin (R)		30.652** (11.121)
North Dakota Gov. Hoeven (R)		49.430** (12.109)
Constant	38.436 (18.270)	36.502 (14.871)
R ²	.200	.548
Adj. R ²	.020	.418
F (df 9, 40) (df 11, 38)	1.11	4.194**
N	50	50

Dependent variable = percentage of words of first State of the State speech related to economic development policy. Unstandardized slope coefficients from ordinary least squares regression analysis. Standard errors in parentheses.

* p < .05; **p<.01 (one tailed-test)

Appendix A: Governors Giving Sampled State of the State Speeches

Governor	State	Party	Year Elected	Yr 1 st SOS
Bob Riley	Alabama	Republican	2002	2003
Sarah Palin*	Alaska	Republican	2006	2007
Janet Napolitano*	Arizona	Democrat	2002	2003
Mike Beebe	Arkansas	Democrat	2006	2007
A. Schwarzenegger ¹	California	Republican	2003	2004
Bill Ritter	Colorado	Democrat	2006	2007
Jodi Rell*	Connecticut	Republican	2006	2007 ^a
Ruth Ann Minner*	Delaware	Democrat	2000	2001
Charlie Crist	Florida	Republican	2006	2007
Sonny Perdue	Georgia	Republican	2002	2003
Linda Lingle*	Hawaii	Republican	2002	2003
Butch Otter	Idaho	Republican	2006	2007
Rod Blagojevich	Illinois	Democrat	2002	2003
Mitch Daniels	Indiana	Republican	2004	2005
Chet Culver	Iowa	Democrat	2006	2007
Kathleen Sebelius*	Kansas	Democrat	2002	2003
Steven Beshear	Kentucky	Democrat	2007	2008
Kathleen Blanco*	Louisiana	Democrat	2003	2004
John Baldacci	Maine	Democrat	2002	2003 ^b
Martin O'Malley	Maryland	Democrat	2006	2007
Deval Patrick	Massachusetts	Democrat	2006	2007
Jennifer Granholm*	Michigan	Democrat	2002	2003
Tim Pawlenty	Minnesota	Republican	2002	2003
Haley Barbour	Mississippi	Republican	2003	2004
Matt Blunt	Missouri	Republican	2004	2005
Judy Martz*	Montana	Republican	2000	2001
Dave Heineman	Nebraska	Republican	2006	2007 ^a
Jim Gibbons	Nevada	Republican	2006	2007
John Lynch	New Hampshire	Democrat	2004	2005 ^b
Jon Corzine	New Jersey	Democrat	2005	2006 ^c
Bill Richardson	New Mexico	Democrat	2002	2003
Eliot Spitzer	New York	Democrat	2006	2007
Beverly Perdue*	North Carolina	Democrat	2008	2009
John Hoeven	North Dakota	Republican	2000	2001
Ted Strickland	Ohio	Democrat	2006	2007
Brad Henry	Oklahoma	Democrat	2002	2003
Ted Kulongoski	Oregon	Democrat	2002	2003
Edward Rendell	Pennsylvania	Democrat	2002	2003 ^c
Don Carcieri	Rhode Island	Republican	2002	2003
Mark Sanford	South Carolina	Republican	2002	2003
Mike Rounds	South Dakota	Republican	2002	2003

Phil Bredesen	Tennessee	Democrat	2002	2003
Rick Perry	Texas	Republican	2002	2003 ^a
Jon Huntsman, Jr.	Utah	Republican	2004	2005
Jim Douglas	Vermont	Republican	2002	2003 ^b
Tim Kaine	Virginia	Democrat	2005	2006
Christine Gregoire*	Washington	Democrat	2004	2005
Joe Manchin III	West Virginia	Democrat	2004	2005
Jim Doyle	Wisconsin	Democrat	2002	2003
Dave Freudenthal	Wyoming	Democrat	2002	2003

Source: National Governors Association, www.nga.org, and Pew Center on the States, www.Stateline.org

^aSucceeded to office. Year of first State of the State (SOS) address after being elected governor in own right.

^bInaugural address (no SOS address given in first year in office)

^cBudget address (serves as SOS address in this state)

¹Arnold Schwarzenegger

* Female governor

Appendix B: Coding Lists for Health Policy: Major Themes

Health Care: Health policy from individual's perspective

Health care, services
 Quality of care, better care
 Access to care, including supply of physicians and nurses in state
 Affordability of care from individual's standpoint (access to care issue)
 Uninsured, access to health insurance, including Medicaid eligibility/coverage
 Affordability of health insurance for patient
 Children's health insurance program
 Health care needs, illness, disease, prevention
 Health outcomes, e.g., immunization, teen pregnancy
 Prescription drug coverage for patients
 Alcohol and drug abuse, addiction and treatment
 Veterans' health care

Health Finance: Health policy from state's perspective

Costs of health care, controlling costs, price of health care system
 Health care financing and affordability from state's perspective
 State spending on Medicaid
 Medicaid reform in terms of cost to state, financing, doctor/hospital reimbursement
 Restructuring health care system to control costs
 Insurance costs for employers
 Controlling costs of state-paid prescription drugs
 State employee health insurance coverage
 Medicaid fraud

Not coded as either Health Care or Finance

Medical malpractice law reform
 Medical industry in context of economic development
 Worker's compensation reform
 Organization (reorganization) of state government agencies, unless context is improving access/services to clients (coded as health care)
 Bioterrorism

Appendix C: Coding List for Economic Development Policy: Major Themes

Economic development
 Business retention
 Tax incentives
Economic growth
 Revitalization
 Venture capital
Economic competition
Job creation
Job retention
Marketing the state
Small business development
Workforce training and development
Business and public education
Higher education and economic growth
Diversification of economy
High technology development
Natural resource development
Energy development
Agriculture
Exports
Business climate
 Regulation
 Costs
Tax reform (in economic development context)
Infrastructure investment
Rural development
State government administrative reform

Appendix D: Descriptive Statistics of the Control Variables for a Governor's Characteristics and Political Environment (N=50)

Variable	Number	Percent	Source
Governor sex			
Female	11	22.0	
Male	39	78.0	(1)
Governor party			
Republican	22	44.0	
Democrat	28	56.0	(2)
Percent women in legislature			
Total sample mean	50	22.63	(3)
Party control of legislature			
2 chambers Democratic	21	42.0	
1 chamber Democratic	8	16.0	
0 chambers Democratic	20	40.0	(4)
Unified/divided government			
Unified	26	52.0	
Compound divided	8	16.0	
Simple divided	15	30.0	(4)
Undergraduate or graduate degree in business or economics			
Yes	11 ¹	22.0	
No	39	78.0	(5)
Prior career experience in business			
Yes	23	46.0	
No	27	54.0	(5)
Penultimate position in private sector			
Yes	6	12.0	
No	44	88.0	(5)

Data sources: (1) National Governors Association. (2) Stateline.org.

(3) Center for American Women and Politics Web site:

http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/StateLeg-HistoricalInfo.php,

“History of Women in State Legislatures 1975-2010.

(4) Carl Klarner, “Data for State Partisan Balance 1959-2007.” State Politics and Policy Quarterly

(SPPQ) Data Resource: http://academic.udayton.edu/SPPQ-TPR/Klarner_datapage.html (5) Governor's official biography at the National Governors Association Web site and the governor's office Web site.

¹ Ten governors received a bachelor's degree in business or economics, three of whom also received a master's in business administration. In addition, Governor John Lynch (NH) received an MBA after a BA in English.

Appendix E: Descriptive Statistics of the Control Variables for Problem and Resource Environments (N=50)

Variable	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Source
State health score	1.69	1.90	11.30	-22.0	23.9	(1)
Percent age 65 or older	12.54	12.85	1.71	6.8	16.8	(2)
Percent in poverty	11.91	11.45	2.86	5.4	17.9	(2)
Percent Medicaid eligible	17.73	16.67	5.15	9.7	29.3	(3)
Per capita Medicaid spending	\$878	\$801	\$308	\$480	\$2,255	(4)
State per capita personal income in year governor elected (constant 2000\$)	\$29,442	\$28,449	\$4,875	\$21,903	\$44,997	(5)
State unemployment rate in year governor elected	4.96	5.10	1.11	2.9	7.6	(6)
Change in state unemployment rate from previous year	0.15	0.05	0.68	-1.2	1.5	(6)
Percent change in U.S. real GDP in year governor elected	2.45	2.50	0.82	0.0	4.1	(7)

Data sources: (1) United Health Foundation, *America's Health Rankings*:

<http://www.americashealthrankings.org>. (2) U.S. Census Bureau data in *CQ's State Fact Finder* (Hovey, K. & Hovey H., 2000-2008 editions). (3) U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Medicaid Statistical Information System, <http://msis.cms.hhs.gov/> (Medicaid Quarterly State Summaries for various fiscal years). (4) U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service data reported in *CQ's State Fact Finder*, 2003, 2005, 2006, and 2007 editions. (5) U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract 2010*. (6) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, "Over-the-Year Change in Unemployment Rates for States, 1999-2009," <http://data.bls.gov>. (7) U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, National Income and Product Accounts Table, Table 1.1.1 "Percent Change from Preceding Period in Real Gross Domestic Product, 2000-2009," <http://www.bea.gov>.

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