

Anna Mitchell Mahoney. *Women Take Their Place in State Legislatures: The Creation of Women's Caucuses.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018. xiii, 241 pp. (\$99.50 cloth, \$29.95 paper, \$29.95 ebook).

This book examines the development of women's caucuses in American state legislatures. The central focus is on those aspects of the legislative environment that serve to enhance or diminish the collective action of women to create effective mechanisms for influencing public policy. Hypotheses concerning the influence of various factors ranging from party polarization and control to the proportion of legislative seats held by women are examined through a case study analysis of four states. The varying political conditions present in the states provide an ideal setting for understanding caucus development. The findings provide important theoretical insight into the conditions that make it possible for women to organize in a way that enhances their influence in the legislative process.

The author begins by pointing to the importance of caucuses in legislatures generally and how they can perform a vital role in the representation process. Caucuses provide a place where likeminded legislators deliberate and formulate policies on issues of mutual interest. They give an opportunity for communicating, sharing experiences, and strategizing for effecting change. Ultimately they are mechanisms that women can use for acting on the priorities of their constituents. The author defines a women's caucus as a "bipartisan, institutionalized association of legislators that seeks to improve women's lives" (p. 8). Such an expansive definition encompasses caucuses that vary dramatically in their purpose and objective. Some are merely social caucuses that give women an opportunity to build relationships and to share information. While others are policy caucuses enabling women lawmakers to discuss and debate policy issues, or even to advocate for specific policy proposals.

Looking at the lay of the land in 2016, Mahoney finds the states almost evenly divided between those that have such caucuses and those that do not. She develops a number of hypotheses that might help explain the presence or absence of women caucuses and tests them using recent data on state characteristics. For example, she finds that women's caucuses are more likely to form in states where there is already a black caucus, where Democrats are in control, where legislative professionalism is low, and where there are comparatively few women holding seats. However, she concludes that descriptive statistics are only suggestive before turning to in-depth case studies to ascertain the conditions that enhance or impede the development of caucuses.

She chose four states to examine, two where women's caucuses were successful at establishing themselves (New Jersey and Colorado) and two where such attempts failed (Pennsylvania and Iowa). Using a variety of data sources and 180 personal interviews with party officials, caucus members, and staff, she compiles an impressive assessment of how various factors produce the specific outcomes observed. In each case study she examines how the institutional features just mentioned play a role along with several additional actors and conditions. For

example, she examines how party competition and polarization might constrain women's ability to organize. She also explores whether characteristics of women legislators play a role. For example, does the presence of more women of color increase the likelihood of forming a caucus? Are a sizable number of freshmen women in the legislature likely to reduce the likelihood of caucus formation? How might the attitudes of women legislatures have an influence? For example, does a shared gender consciousness result in caucus development? How do perceptions concerning the responsiveness of party organizations or of opposition from male colleagues play a role?

Each of four chapters offers an impressive and thorough assessment of the conditions specific to that state that affects the likelihood of caucus development. The key finding to emerge is that the conditions affecting the success of caucus formation vary greatly from state to state. In the successful states, entrepreneurs working within a context of Democratic Party control eased the pathway for caucus development. The presence of other caucuses along with low levels of partisanship also contribute to successful caucus formation. Lack of a strong gender consciousness, low enthusiasm from party leaders, and highly polarized environment were usually associated with failed attempts.

Overall, the four case study chapters provide a clear and detailed accounting of how the various conditions and actions of pivotal players had an influence. My only criticism of the book is that I wish the conclusion had provided a more systematic evaluation of the findings that summarize the relative effects of the variables examined. In other words, what set of variables are most important for understanding the presence or absence of women's caucuses in the states? Could the factors be ranked in some fashion to demonstrate their relative effects? Clearer statements characterizing these effects would help the reader understand how these findings contribute to existing theories. But even without such summary statements, the findings provide an enlightened assessment of the conditions that contribute to an important aspect of women's representation in state legislatures. This book will be of interest to a wide array of scholars who study issues of gender representation, state legislatures, and organizational development. In more practical terms, these findings provide a blueprint for legislators interested in creating a women's caucus by pointing to the conditions that generally work to facilitate or impede such efforts.

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