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Women in New England Politics

Paige Ransford, Carol Hardy-Fanta, and Anne Marie Cammisa

This essay addresses a serious deficiency in the literature on women and politics in the United States today: the lack of attention to regional variation and, more specifically, the absence of research on women's representation in New England. This deficiency is particularly troubling since political analysts of all stripes typically portray New England as imbued with ideological, individual, and structural characteristics likely to lead to rates of political representation higher than the nation as a whole. This essay provides a brief history of women in politics for New England as a whole; describes the current status of women at congressional, statewide, state legislative, and municipal levels of government in each of the states (with a comparison to other regions and the nation as a whole); and analyzes the prospects for increasing women's political representation in the region. This essay concludes that it is unlikely that the New England states will achieve anything close to parity in the higher-level offices if the numbers do not increase substantially in the city or town councils, boards of selectmen, boards of aldermen, and other local governing bodies.

The history of women in New England[1] is dual-natured. For every frugal Yankee farmer, there was an equally frugal and hard-workingwife. The patriarchal Pilgrim and Puritan societies relied on women to maintain homes and families and to inculcate the Protestant work ethic in their children. The colonial boycotts of British tea and fabrics could not have worked had women not been willing to go without and make substitutions. While democratic ideas about the rights of man flourished during and after the colonial period in New England, women were excluded from political and economic rights. Of course, New England was not the only place in the nation or the world where women were relegated to hearth and home, but the contrast between democratic liberty and individualism on the

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one hand, and women's status as property of husbands and fathers on the other, seems particularly stark here.

Women in New England have long been involved in politics, but that involvement has only recently been in elective offices. The history of New England is replete with women who imparted democratic values through their families as well as those who took a more public role by speaking, marching, and protesting about such issues as abolishing slavery and granting women the vote. Perhaps the most intertwined of all the reform movements were abolitionism and suffrage. When seen in terms of equal rights, and not simply the abolition of slavery, the one led logically to the other, although success would come much sooner for the antislavery movement. Numerous luminaries from both movements were from the New England states including Harriet Beecher Stowe from Maine and Lucy Stone of Massachusetts and Alice Paul (a Connecticut resident) who, in the year 1919, founded the Congressional Union, which later became the National Woman's Party.

While not all women had the economic means (and progressive-minded husbands) to allow them to participate in these activities, the very nature of New England's economic and social structure created the wherewithal for a privileged class to involve itself in politics. The women who took on these roles were acting in both a traditional and a progressive manner. They were traditional in the sense that they were, for the most part, married women of means whose political interests stayed close to the private world of family and children (as opposed to business or academia). They were progressive in the sense that they ventured out of that private world to make a mark on the public sphere, and that their goals often included a radical restructuring of society. Traditionalism and progressivism were and are hallmarks of New England society. Women who initially entered the political world of state and local government came from both schools of thought. Some were traditional homemakers, civic-minded women whose efforts at volunteerism easily translated into political action and office holding. These women sought not to radically transform the world of politics, but rather to add their voices to it. They wanted to be accepted and respected in what was (and still is) the masculine domain of state politics. Women of a more traditionalist nature wanted to integrate into existing political life. Others came to politics by way of the women's rights movement of the 1960s. Their interests were more radical and transformative. They wished to change both public policy and the political process itself, making it more open to both feminist policy agendas and what they saw as women's unique ways of practicing politics.

A quick glance at the landscape of women in New England politics today shows both that old traditions die hard and that progressivism is alive and

well. Women have made great strides in New England in some ways and in some areas; women are still lagging far behind in other respects. As it is in many other ways, New England here is a study in contrasts.

Women in Congress

In 1925, Edith Nourse Rogers (R-MA) was the first woman from the region to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives; she "won a special election to fill a vacancy caused by the death of her husband; she was subsequently reelected" and served until 1960.[2] Similarly, Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) first became a U.S. Representative in 1940 through the death of her husband but won reelection and served until she ran for the U.S. Senate in 1948, where she remained for over twenty years. (Smith also holds the distinction of being the first woman to be nominated for United States President by a major party in 1964. The next woman to run for the presidency and make it to a major party convention was Shirley Chisolm in 1972.) Clare Boothe Luce, of Connecticut, who was elected in 1942, followed soon after Smith and served until 1946 when she became Ambassador to Italy. Chase Going Woodhouse (D-CT) served two (non-consecutive) terms in the mid-1940s.

Despite these impressive "firsts," New England has not kept up with this early promise. New Hampshire and Vermont, for example, are just two of five states in the country that have never sent a woman to either branch of the U.S. Congress. Massachusetts has had three women in the U.S. House but has not elected a woman since Margaret Heckler (R-MA), who was first elected in 1966, and was forced by redistricting to run against Barney Frank in 1982, and Massachusetts has never sent a woman to the U.S. Senate. Rhode Island has had one woman in Congress: Claudine Schneider (R) served from 1981 to 1991.

Congressional seats are important for at least two reasons: first, they are offices of statewide significance (indeed, U.S. senators are elected by the state as a whole), influencing programs and funding that will affect the entire state. Second, they are offices of national significance, providing visibility to the state and influencing national policies. Having women in these offices means that women have power, prestige, and influence. If women are well represented in Congress, then they have achieved a high political profile and have moved into the upper echelons of decision makers. Without adequate representation at the Congressional level, women's status as political players has not been solidified. One can only conclude that New England is a "mixed bag" with respect to women in Congress — with a strong presence in Connecticut and Maine but very limited success in the other states. What may be most striking about the states of Maine, Massa-

chusetts, and Rhode Island is that just one of the seven women to hold congressional office has been a Democrat. It is only in Connecticut, where six women have served in the U.S. House of Representatives, that the majority of women in Congress have been Democrats.

Women in Statewide Offices

It is in state-level offices that policies affecting everyday life — from taxes to education and from transportation to medical care — are made. Obviously, governors are the most visible statewide elected officials. This office has national importance as well, considering that four of the last five U.S. presidents have been governors. As a region, the history of women in New England fares a bit better with women governors than it does with women in Congress. The first woman governor ever to be elected in her own right was Ella Grasso, a Democrat from Connecticut, who served from 1975 to 1980. Since then, there have been only twenty-five female governors in the United States as a whole and five of these have been from New England; Grasso, Vesta Roy (R-NH); Madeleine Kunin (D-VT), who is the only woman in the nation to be elected to three full terms as governor; Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH); and Jane Swift (R-MA). Four of the six New England states have had female governors.[3] New Hampshire can claim the first woman to run for governor *prior to women's right to vote*: Marilla Marks Young Ricker ran for that office in 1910.[4]

Of course, simple numbers or statistics do not tell the full story. Vesta Roy, for example, only served for seven days (she was appointed to office when the incumbent had died). Jane Swift, after having been elected lieutenant governor in Massachusetts, succeeded Governor Paul Cellucci in 2001 when he resigned to become ambassador to Canada. She dropped out of the race for governor in 2002 after a grueling campaign in which some say she was unfairly attacked because she was a woman. Prevailing wisdom is that gender was also an issue in subtle ways for Shannon O'Brien, the Democratic candidate in the same race, as it was for candidate Deborah (Arnie) Arneson in the 2002 New Hampshire gubernatorial primary; both lost their elections.

How have women in New England fared in other statewide offices? Connecticut, Vermont, and Rhode Island differ greatly from the other three states. Connecticut has elected thirteen women to be secretary of state, two lieutenant governors, a state treasurer, and a controller. Vermont has had two secretaries of state (one who was appointed), two lieutenant governors, two state treasurers (one who was appointed), and one state auditor. Even Rhode Island, a state with a less than stellar track record in women's representation, has elected three women secretaries of state, a state trea-

surer, and an attorney general; it should be pointed out, however, that three of these only served one term.

Maine, in contrast, is one of only two states in the country never to have elected a woman to statewide elective office. (In its defense, Maine, like New Hampshire, has only one statewide elective office, that of governor.) Massachusetts has elected three women lieutenant governors: Evelyn Murphy, a Democrat, was elected in 1987 and served one four-year term; Jane Swift (2001 to 2003, when she became governor) and Kerry Healey (R), elected in 2003. Moreover, as we go to press, not only is Kerry Healey running for governor of Massachusetts, but Martha Coakley is also running virtually unopposed for attorney general in that state, which has never elected a woman attorney general or secretary of state.

A history of women in New England state legislatures is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is useful to note the "firsts" in each state. In 1920, Jessie Doe and Marie Louise Rolfe Farnum were elected to the New Hampshire House; the first woman elected to the New Hampshire State Senate was E. Maude Fergusson in 1931.[5] A number of women were elected in 1921 to their state houses of representatives (for example, Edna Beard (NH); Sylvia Donaldson and Susan Fitzgerald (MA); and Isabelle Ahern O'Neill (RI). Achieving a seat in the state senates was more difficult and generally occurred later: Consuelo Northrup Bailey in 1930 (VT); E. Maude Fergusson in 1931 (NH); Sybil Homes in 1936 (MA); and Florence Murray in 1948 (RI). Maine stands out again — electing Dora Pinkham to the Maine State Senate in 1923.[6]

Current Status of Women Elected Officials in New England

Table 1 shows the current status of women in the New England region as compared to the United States as a whole.

Women in Congress

Nationally, women held 81 (15.1 percent) of the 535 seats in the 109th United States Congress; 14 percent of the U.S. Senators are women and 15.4 percent of those in the U.S. House of Representatives are women. In contrast, only four women (11.8 percent) from New England — (Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Nancy Johnson (R-CT), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and Susan Collins (R-ME) — then served in Congress, and these women represent only two states. Because of Senators Snowe and Collins, the regional share (16.7 percent) for women in the U.S. Senate is higher than the national average; however, just two (9.1 percent) of the twenty-two New

England seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are held by women — a presence that is considerably lower than the national average. Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont have no women in the U.S. Congress.

Table 1.
Women in Congressional and Statewide Elected Office, U.S. and New England, 2006

	United States		New England	
	Total	Women	Total	Women
U.S. Senate	100	14 (14.0)	12	2 (16.7)
U.S. House	435	67 (15.4)	22	2 (09.1)
Governor	50	8 (16.0)	6	1 (16.7)
Other Statewide*	265	70 (26.4)	20	5 (20.0)

*The national count of "other statewide offices" includes the offices of lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general, auditor, controller, and a number of other elected executive offices.
Source: Analysis by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy of data from U.S. Census Bureau (2005) and Center for American Women and Politics (2006).

New England does not have any congressional representation by women of color.[7] The region with the most representation by people of color at this level of office is the West with eighteen, eight (44 percent) of whom are women — three black women and five Latinas. A close second is the South Atlantic with sixteen, 25 percent of whom are women (three black women and one Latina). The Southwest with nine has the third highest number (including two black women but no Latina women). The Mid-Atlantic states also have nine members of Congress, but just one of them is a woman. The South, surprisingly, has just three black members of Congress who are all male.[8]

Women in Statewide Office

The chief executive officer of the state is a very important position within the political arena. Its implications in the pipeline are also significant as seven United States presidents were governors.[9] In 2006, New England is on par with the nation in that currently, with one women governor, Jodi Rell of Connecticut, the regional average matches the national (see Table 1). She was not elected to the post but ascended to office after serving ten years as lieutenant governor when Governor John Rowland resigned during a

corruption investigation. (Rell is Connecticut's second female governor and ran successfully for reelection.) Kerry Healey (R-MA) is former lieutenant governor of Massachusetts who ran for governor. If she had won, she would have been the first woman elected governor in the state. (Jane Swift became acting governor in 2001 and served until January 2003.)

Other statewide executive offices have important responsibilities developing policies that affect the people of the communities in the areas of taxes, education, health care, and community development. In New England as well as other states, the lieutenant governor's post and other statewide offices (for example, secretary of state and attorney general) also have served as launching pads for the governor's office. So, how does New England fare? In the United States, there are 265 statewide elective offices beside governor (see Table 1) and women hold seventy (26.4 percent) of these. In New England, there are twenty elected officials at the executive level and women hold five (25 percent) of these — very close to the national average. There is considerable variation among states, however, which skews the picture state–by–state.

Connecticut, for example, has three of the five statewide officials in the region, including Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz; State Comptroller Nancy Wyman; and the only female state treasurer in New England, Denise Nappier — who holds the distinction of being the first African American elected to that position in the nation. Vermont has one female in statewide office, Deborah Markowitz who is secretary of state. New Hampshire, Maine, and Rhode Island, in contrast, have no women serving in statewide elective office. (In defense of Maine and New Hampshire, they each have only one statewide elective office, that of governor.) And, as indicated earlier, out of six constitutional officers in the state at eh time of writing, Massachusetts had just one woman, Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey.

Women in the State Legislatures

Much of the activity of state government takes place in state legislatures. The number of women in state legislatures, while small compared to the number of men, has always been much higher than the number of women in state-level executive positions or in Congress; 1,686 (22.8 percent) of the 7,382 state legislators in the United States are women. The percentages range from a low of 8.8 percent of the South Carolina legislature to a high of 35.6 percent in Maryland.

Table 2 shows that, in 2006, the percentage of women in New England's state legislatures is higher (27.5 percent) compared to the nation as a whole. In all but one of the New England states (Rhode Island), the percentage of

women in state legislatures exceeds the national average, but this varies substantially among the six states (see Table 2). As recently as 2003, Vermont and Connecticut were among the top ten states with the highest percentages of women state legislators (ranked five and eight, respectively), but in 2006, no New England state is among the top ten.[10] Vermont has the highest percentage of women legislators (33.3 percent), followed closely by New Hampshire with 30.4 percent. Rhode Island ranks last in the region,

Table 2.
Women in State Legislatures U.S. and New England, 2006

	Total State Legislators	Women #	Women %
United States	7,382	1686	22.8
New England	1,290	355	27.5
Connecticut	187	54	28.9
Maine	186	43	23.1
Massachusetts	200	50	25.0
New Hampshire	424	129	30.4
Rhode Island	113	19	16.8
Vermont	180	60	33.3

Source: Analysis by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy of data from U.S Census Bureau (2005) and Center for American Women and Politics (2006).

with women only 16.8 percent of the legislature — making it the only state in the region where the percentage of women is below the national average.

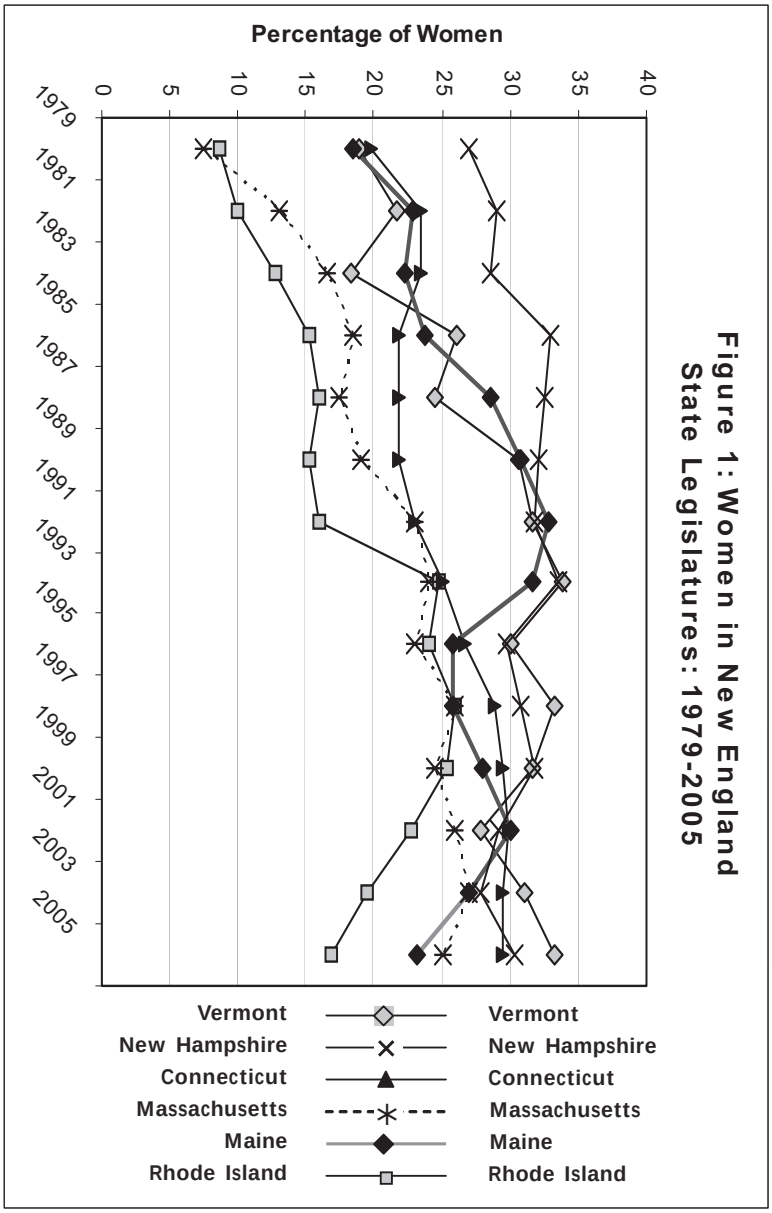
Four states have seen declines in the percentage of women legislators since 1993: Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont (see Figure 1). Rhode Island's dramatic decline was precipitated by a decision to reduce the size of the legislature in 2002.

New England also does well with representation by people of color at the level of state legislatures with forty-five, including three of the nation's American Indian legislators. Thirty-eight percent of New England's legislators of color are women including eleven black, five Latina, and one American Indian woman.[11]

Women in Municipal Government

Gathering reliable data at the national or regional levels on the extent to which women have achieved representation in elected municipal offices (for example, city/town councils and boards of selectmen or aldermen) is re-

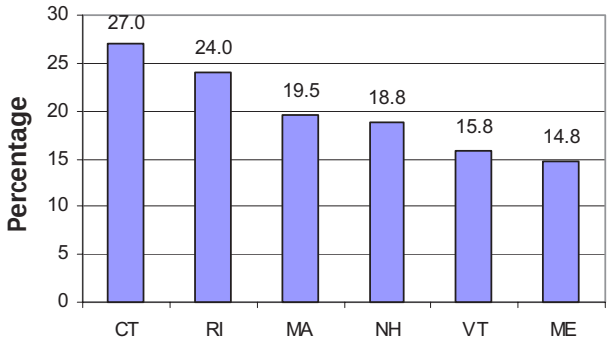
Women in New England State Legislatures 1979-2005



Source: Analysis by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy of data provided by the Center for American Women and Politics.

markably difficult. The best estimate at the national level is a 2001 survey of city councils that suggests that, although city councils have become racially more diverse, little has changed in the gender makeup of councils since 1979. In this survey, Svara found that 28.3 percent of the city councilors in cities 25,000 or larger were women. This was a drop, however, from 31.8 percent in the 1979 survey (which oversampled larger cities) but a very slight increase from the 1989 survey result of 26.4 percent.[12] In 2003, we conducted the first such count for the six states in New England. Figure 2 shows the breakdown by state in women's representation at the municipal level.

Figure 2: Women Elected Municipal Officials in New England, by State, 2003



Source: Analysis by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy (2003) based on municipal data collected from municipal directories and Internet sources.

As can be seen in this figure, Connecticut had the highest percentage (27.0 percent) of women holding municipal office in New England — a percentage closest to that of the national average of 28.3 — followed by 24 percent for Rhode Island, 19.5 for Massachusetts, 18.8 percent for New Hampshire, and 15.8 percent for Vermont; Maine had the lowest percentage of women of all the New England states (14.8 percent). Thus, women's representation at the municipal level is *lower* than the national average in all six New England states.

Gender Parity in Elected Office: A Comparison of State Legislative and Municipal Representation

One way of examining whether women's levels of representation approach equality is to calculate parity ratios by level of office (that is, the percentage

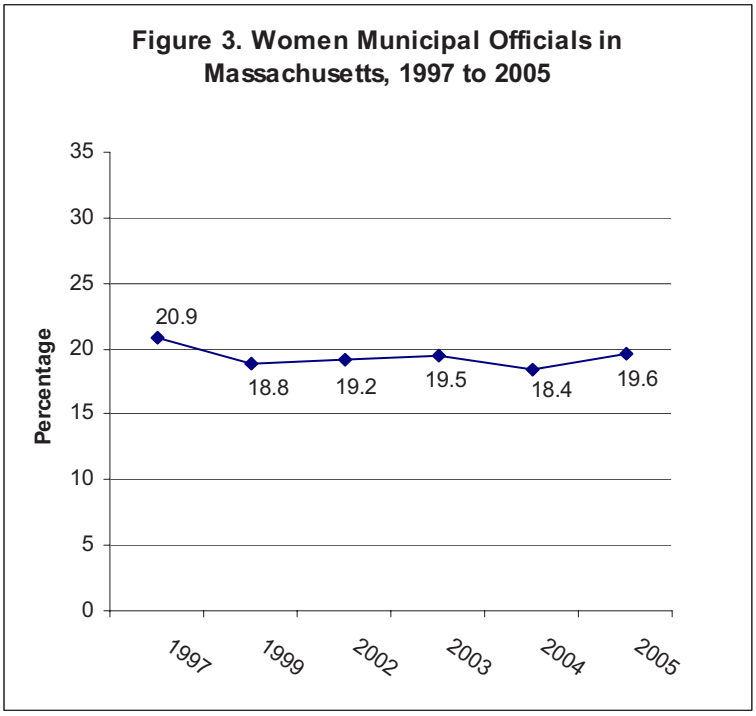
of women in a given elected office as a ratio of their percentage in the population). Gender parity is achieved when the two are equal and the parity ratio is 1. Table 3 compares the parity ratios for women in New England and indicates that (1) women have not achieved anything close to parity at either state legislative or municipal levels in any state of the region; (2) for all six states, women's representation in municipal office lags even further behind that of their representation at the state legislative level; and (3) for all states other than Maine and Connecticut, the parity ratios are *substantially l*ower at the municipal level than at the state legislative level. Connecticut's parity ratios for both levels are the most similar in the region; Rhode Island's are both the lowest. Vermont has the highest discrepancy between the two levels with the highest parity ratio (0.65) at the legislative level and yet the lowest at the municipal level (0.29).

Table 3.
Gender & Parity Ratios for Legislative & Municipal Levels

State	Legislative Parity	Municipal Parity
Connecticut	0.560	0.560
Maine	0.450	0.450
Massachusetts	0.482	0.482
New Hampshire	0.598	0.598
Rhode Island	0.323	0.323
Vermont	0.653	0.653

Source: Analysis by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy.
Note: Municipal data are from 2003; Legislative data are from 2006.

Improvement or decline? Measuring change over time. Change over time is difficult to measure at the municipal level for the reasons stated above. Therefore, our trend data at the municipal level are restricted to one New England state: Massachusetts. Trend analysis in Massachusetts has been conducted by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston for almost a decade. Figure 3 shows that, in 1997, 20.9 percent of city/town councilors and members of boards of aldermen/selectmen were women compared to just 19.6 percent today. It is possible to conclude from the data shown in this figure that, first, women's representation in municipal office in this state is lower than that of the state legislature (see Table 2); and that, second, rather than see growth in the numbers of women, their representation has remained stagnant and is lower today than ten years ago.



Source: Analysis by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, 2006

Furthermore, we have found that, of the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts, 139 (39.6 percent) currently have *no* women on their municipal governing body. Finally, in the four largest cities, Boston, Lowell, Springfield, and Worcester, women occupy only seven (16.7 percent) of the combined forty-two seats.

Race, Gender, and Regional Differences in Municipal Office Holding

Very little information has been available heretofore on municipal officials by race, sex, and geographical distribution. Our analysis indicates that different patterns emerge at the municipal level than at the state legislature level. Whereas 38 percent of elected officials of color holding state legislative office in New England are women; 45 percent of black municipal officials in the region are black women and 33 percent of Latino municipal officials are Latina women. Surprisingly, those statistics suggest that, though their numbers may be smaller, black and Latina women do somewhat better as a proportion of their racial/ethnic group in the New England states than in other regions of the country.[13]

Deficiency in the Literature

The literature on women in politics uniformly portrays their status as one of under-representation at all levels of government. Much of the research that has been done on women in elected office indicates that, from the 1970s throughout the early 1990s, women's political participation was on the upswing. As women headed into the twenty-first century, however, their representation in government has either increased only slightly or leveled off, depending on the office. In some states, it has even declined.[14] A 2006 report by the Center for Women in Government and Civil Society concludes, "Women's representation in the top ranks of political leadership fell below expected levels of participation based on their percentage of the state's population."[15]

Although much has been written addressing the history and status of women in government in the United States, virtually nothing has been published on the state of women in elected office in New England. An unpublished monograph by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy is the only comprehensive document that provides comparative statistics and a regional (as well as state-by-state) history.[16] This study examines why New England has not fared better when it comes to women in elected office. More, but still very little, has been published on the individual states in the region. A number of works focus on women governors Grasso and Kunin from Connecticut and Vermont;[17] women in the U.S. Congress such as Margaret Chase Smith from Maine;[18] leadership and policy priorities of women state legislators[19] and personal accounts of running for elected office in Massachusetts;[20] and the history of women state legislators in Rhode Island.[21] Others focus on the history of women's political organizing, including the women's club movement and women's roles in suffrage and abolition.[22] Finally, other than discussions embedded in more general (or unpublished) works, research on the political activities of women of color in the New England states has received the least attention of all. The literature on this topic points to the early contributions of black and Native American women to education, suffrage, and abolition in New England; research by Hardy-Fanta sheds light on the links between community activism and elected office among Latinas in Massachusetts.[23]

The need for research and analysis on women's political representation in New England is based in part on the region's reputation as more progressive and somewhat liberal (especially the three most populous and diverse "southern tier" states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island). The question persists: why has this region not achieved a higher degree of equality for women in the political arena given the overall progress women have made in the areas of educational attainment, employment and earn-

ings, and health and well-being — factors usually indicative of growing political equality for women? For instance, Connecticut's women are the most prosperous women in New England, ranking first in employment and earnings, and in social and economic autonomy indices. Massachusetts shares the rank of first in the nation for political resources available to women, and New Hampshire has the highest rate of women in the labor force in the region. Vermont elected and appointed women to local political positions even before they attained the right to vote. Finally, in 2002 Maine ranked second in the country for women's political participation, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research.[24]

This essay begins with a brief history of some of the achievements of women in elected office since — and even before — women achieved the right to vote. This history brings to light the important links between the suffrage and abolition movements and the roles of women of color even in states that were — and today often still are — considered racially very homogeneous. We document the women who have risen to and those who have been elected to the top posts in Congress in the years prior to the second wave of the women's movement; those who have become governor or achieved other statewide offices. Throughout this history we examine the wide variation between the states comparing the success of Connecticut, Vermont, and New Hampshire in electing women governors with the other three states, which have never elected a woman governor; the case of Maine with two women U.S. Senators compared to New Hampshire, and Vermont that have never sent a woman to either branch of the U.S. Congress — and Massachusetts, which has not had a woman in Congress for more than twenty years. We conclude, nevertheless, that a comprehensive history of women in politics still needs to be written.

Our analysis of the current status of women's political representation illustrates the "study in contrasts" posed by the New England states. New England does slightly better than the national average for women in the U.S. Senate (only because of Maine's two women Senators) but considerably worse for representation in the U.S. House. As disappointing as it might be to Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont, the region is on par with the nation in terms of women governors but is somewhat lower in the percentage of women in other statewide offices. At the state legislative level, New England, with women making up 27.5 percent of state legislators, currently surpasses the nation where the average is just 22.8 percent. But the range is extreme — from Rhode Island's low of just 16.8 percent to Vermont's high of 33.3 percent. New England needs more women in state legislatures.

Several questions immediately arise: Why does the region lag behind the nation in women's representation at the congressional level? What explains

the low levels of legislative parity shown in Table 3 for Massachusetts, Maine, and, especially, Rhode Island? Answers to these two questions are not unrelated. Women in state legislatures, for example, not only have an effect on the policies in those bodies, but they also enter the "pipeline" as potential candidates for higher offices, including the U.S. Congress. Political scientists have noted several factors that affect the number of women in state legislatures: professionalism, political culture, and the nature of political districts (to name a few).[25] We see evidence of these and other factors, at play in explaining the state-by-state differences in this region.

First, state legislatures may be classified as "professional," "citizen," or "mixed." A professional legislature generally meets full-time, pays its legislators full salaries, and provides staff and other resources to the legislators. Researchers have posited that a professional legislature may make it difficult for newcomers, such as women, to enter. A citizen legislature is one in which the job of legislator is not considered a full-time profession, and there are generally few resources available to state legislators. The rationale behind a citizen legislature is that it keeps legislators closer to the people. Ordinary citizens, not professional politicians, may be elected to a citizen legislature, making it more in keeping with the concept of direct democracy.

As one might imagine, New England states, with their strong tradition of direct democracy and citizen involvement in government, are more likely to have citizen legislatures. Only one state, Massachusetts, has a professional legislature. One other, Connecticut, has a mixed legislature (it has some characteristics of a professional legislature and some characteristics of a citizen legislature). The professional nature of the Massachusetts state legislature may partially explain why the state, which is progressive in many areas, is near the bottom of New England states with respect to its proportion of women state legislators: faced with opportunities for good salaries and prestige, men compete more vigorously for seats in the Massachusetts legislature, effectively blocking women's chances. The type of legislature is not sufficient to explain variation in women's representation, however. Rhode Island, for example, is a citizen legislature and yet it trails far behind Massachusetts and all other New England states in its percentage of women state legislators.

The explanation for Rhode Island comes by examining a combination of size and features of the electoral system — which changed in recent years. Women's representation in the state rose from a low of 8.7 percent in 1979 to a level comparable to other New England states (26 percent) in 1998. It hovered in that range until the legislature was downsized from 150 to 113 members and women were forced to compete for fewer seats overall. Women's representation in Rhode Island has continued to drop in such a

competitive environment and is now just 16.8 percent — the lowest in the region and well below the national average. Downsizing in this case overcame any benefits of a citizen legislature for the women of Rhode Island. Size factors may partially explain New Hampshire's status as having the highest degree of gender parity in the region (see Table 3). With 424 seats overall (and few statewide offices to run for), women in the Granite State have seized on opportunities to run. Maine's relatively low level of representation now seems puzzling at first, given the state's success in the U.S. Senate. The puzzle is quickly solved by noting that Maine is the only state in New England where the voters chose to impose term limits. Many scholars and activists had pointed to term limits as an avenue for women's political advancement and were surprised to find that the short-term effects were an immediate and sometimes precipitous decline in the percentage of women in the affected state legislatures.[26] Women's representation in Maine rose steeply following the "year of the woman" in 1992 but, after a short boost from 1996 through 2001 (see Figure 1), it has fallen steadily since then to a level that is second lowest in the region (see Tables 1 and 3).

In comparison to the amount of research on women's representation in congressional, statewide, and state legislative offices, studies of women in municipal government are very limited and/or out of date.[27] Reasons for the paucity of research at the local level include the number of municipal jurisdictions; the variety of municipal government structures (cities, towns, and villages) and complexity of electoral systems (for example, mayor vs. city/town manager; city/town councils, town meetings, boards of aldermen/selectmen); and the sheer size of the data collection task. Neglecting women's representation in elected municipal government is unfortunate, however, because of two factors: first, the importance of city/town government in sustaining democracy and linking people of the community to government, and second, in serving as a pipeline for women's election to higher office. Research suggests that women, especially, start at the local level (school board, city or town council), move on to state legislative office or statewide executive office, and then progress to congressional office. Scholars refer to this as the "political pipeline."[28] In order to move women along this pipeline something needs to be done about the stagnation or leveling-off of the numbers of women in state and local government. Early entry into the political pipeline for women is critical to women's political participation.[29]

We rely on local government to ensure that necessary services, such as police and fire protection, transportation, housing, and education are provided to the community. Both men and women may have similar concerns for their communities, but democracy also requires a "seat at the table" that reflects the make-up of the constituents themselves.[30] With state

populations all over 50 percent women, representative democracy would seem to demand something close to gender parity in municipal government, including parity for the cities and towns of New England. Research suggests that women in municipal decision-making positions can increase the delivery of services to more women and families, incorporate a more collaborative way of working, increase the number of people's concerns heard from the community, act as role models for children, bring about change and encourage other women to run.[31] Researchers agree that more women in politics could bring to the forefront gender-based issues often ignored by male politicians.[32] Issues of concern to women include reproductive rights; child welfare; domestic violence; and family-friendly policies.[33]

The major conclusion — and call to action — from this essay is that, while activists and scholars may wring their hands over the dearth of women in Congress, in statewide office, and/or in the state legislatures in New England, the problem of low, stagnant, or declining representation at the local level is even more serious. It is unlikely that the New England states will achieve anything close to parity in the higher-level offices if the numbers do not increase substantially in the city or town councils, boards of selectmen, boards of aldermen, and other local governing bodies.

This essay is, therefore, a first attempt at providing a brief history of women in politics for New England as a whole; describing the current status of women at congressional, statewide, state legislative, and municipal levels of government in each of the states (with a comparison to other regions and the nation as a whole); and analyzing some of the factors that explain the prospects for increasing women's political representation in the region. We have also included analysis by race/ethnicity wherever possible.

Notes

1. Much of this history first appeared in Carol Hardy-Fanta, ed., *Women in New England Politics: A Profile and Handbook for Action* (Boston: Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts Boston, 2003); prepared for use at the New England Women's Political Summit held in 2003. Included in this volume is a summary of the region: Anne Marie Cammisa, "New England Women in Politics: A Regional Overview."
2. Center for the American Woman in Politics, "Massachusetts**:** Women in Elective Office — Historical Summary." Accessed August 23, 2006 from www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts/StbySt/MA.html.
3. Data on specific women officeholders are generally from the Center for the American Woman in Politics, "State by State Historical Summaries." Accessed August 23, 2006 from www.cawp.rutgers.edu/Facts4.html.
4. LeeAnn Richey, "Reading between the lines: Marilla Ricker in the Struggle for Women's Rights." Women's Legal History Biography Project at Stanford Law School, 2002. Accessed on February 26, 2003, from www.stanford.edu/group/WLHP/papers/Marillapaper.pdf.
5. For a list of firsts (and a more complete history of women in politics) in New Hampshire, see Mary Bouchard and Mariamawit Sileshi, "State Profile: New Hampshire," in Hardy-Fanta, *Women in New England Politics*, 77–96.
6. See chapters in Hardy-Fanta, *Women in New England Politics*, for a more detailed state-by-state history of women in these states.
7. Note: in this analysis we use the nine Census "divisions" that make it possible to compare New England as a discrete cluster of states; we use the term "region" rather than the technically correct "division" because of its more common usage.
8. Regional data on women elected officials are from the Gender and Multicultural Leadership Project, 2006.
9. Anne M. Cammisa, "New England Women in Politics: A Regional Overview," in Hardy-Fanta, *Women in New England Politics*, 1–12.
10. State rankings are from the Center for the American Woman in Politics, "Women in State Legislatures 2006." Accessed June 2006 from www.cawp.rutgers.edu/facts.html#leg.
11. Carol Hardy-Fanta, et al., "Gender, Race and Descriptive Representation: A Multi-Office and Multicultural Analysis of a National Dataset of Elected Officials of Color in the United States" (forthcoming).
12. For further discussion about those who sit on city councils, see James Svara, "Two Decades of Continuity and Change in America's City Councils." Commissioned by the National League of Cities (September 2003).
13. Carol Hardy-Fanta, et al., "Gender, Race and Descriptive Representation" (forthcoming).
14. Center for Women in Government & Civil Society, "Women in State Policy Leadership, 1998–2005. An Analysis of Slow and Uneven Progress," (Center for Women in Government & Civil Society, State University of New York at Albany, 2006); Susan J. Carroll, "Women in State Government: Historical Overview and Current Trends." The Book of the States, 2004. Accessed June 2006 from www.cawp.ritgers.edu/Research/Reports/BookofStates.pdf.

15. Quoted in the Center for Women in Government & Civil Society, "Women in State Policy Leadership, 1998–2005."
16. Carol Hardy-Fanta, ed., *Women in New England Politics: A Profile and Handbook for Action* (Boston: Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts Boston, 2003); prepared for use at the New England Women's Political Summit held in 2003. Included in this volume is a summary of the region: Anne Marie Cammisa, "New England Women in Politics: A Regional Overview."
17. See, for example, Susan Bysiewicz, *Ella: A Biography of Governor Ella Grasso* (Old Saybrook, Conn.: Peregrine Press, 1984) and a number of works by Governor Madeleine Kunin, including "Lessons from One Woman's Career," *Journal of State Governmen*t 60 (1987): 209–12, and *Living a Political Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

    18. See Patricia L. Schmidt, *Margaret Chase Smith: Beyond Convention* (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press,1996) and Janann Sherman, *No Place for a Woman: A Life of Senator Margaret Chase Smith* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000).
19. Anne Marie Cammisa. "Women Officeholders in Massachusetts: Leadership and Policy Priorities," Paper Presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the New England Political Science Association, Radisson Hotel, New London, Connecticut, May 2–3, 1997.
20. Betty Taymor, *Running against the Wind: The Struggle of Women in Massachusetts Politics* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000).
21. See Emily Stier Adler and J. Stanley Lemons, *The Elect: Rhode Island's Women Legislators, 1922–1990* (Providence: League of Rhode Island Historical Societies, 1990), and "The Independent Woman: Rhode Island's First Woman Legislator," *Rhode Island Historical Journal* 49 (1991): 2–11.
22. See, for example, Alice Harriman, *A History of the New Hampshire Federation of Women's Clubs, 1895–1940* (Bristol, N.H.: Musgrove Printing House, 1941) and Ida H. Harper ed., *History of Women's Suffrage* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).
23. For discussions of women of color in selected states, see, for example, Corinna Joy Balash, Tsige Negash, and Erika Kates, "State Profile: Connecticut," in Hardy-Fanta, *Women in New England Politics,* 24–6; Carol L. Cardozo, Nuvia Ball-Burrell, Brenda Pedraza, and Barbara Miranda, "State Profile: Massachusetts," in Hardy-Fanta, *Women in New England Politics*, 60, 69–72; and Elizabeth Goodwin, Deborah A. Hogan, and Carol Hardy-Fanta, "State Profile: Rhode Island," in Hardy-Fanta, *Women in New England Politics*, 98–115. For more on Latina women in politics in Massachusetts, see Carol Hardy-Fanta, Latina Politics, *Latino Politics: Gender, Culture and Political Participation in Boston* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) and *Latino Electoral Campaigns in Massachusetts: The Impact of Gender* (Boston: Mauricio Gastón Institute and Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts Boston, 1997).
24. Institute for Women's Policy Research, *Status of Women in the States, 2002: Highlights*, Publication #R199 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2002).
25. Sections of this and the following paragraphs appeared in a somewhat different form in Cammisa, *Political Profile: A Regional Overview*, 1–12.
26. See, for example, Susan J. Carroll and Krista Jenkins, "Unrealized Opportunity: Term Limits and The Representation of Women in State Legislatures," *Women and Politics* 23(4) (2001): 1–30.
27. For exceptions see, for example, Susan Beck, "Rethinking Municipal Governance: Gender Distinctions on Local Councils." ed. D. L. Dodson, *Gender and Policymaking*

(New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University, 1991); Charles S. Bullock III, and Susan A. MacManus, "Municipal Electoral Structure and the Election of Councilwomen." *Journal of Politics* 53 (1991): 75–88; Arnold Fleischmann and Lana Stein, "Minority and Female Success in Municipal Runoff Elections," *Social Science Quarterly* 68 (1987):378–85; Susan A. MacManus and Charles S. Bullock III, "Women and Racial/ Ethnic Minorities in Mayoral and Council Positions." *Municipal Yearbook 1993* (International City Management Association, 1993): 70–84. Sharyne Merritt, "Winners and Losers: Sex Differences in Municipal Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 21 (1977): 731–43, and Elizabeth Sherman and Susan H. Rohrbach, "Opportunities and Dilemmas for Women Elected Municipal Officials." Boston, Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs, University of Massachusetts Boston, 1996.

28. See Susan J. Carroll, "Women in State Government: Historical Overview and Current Trends"; Anne M. Cammisa, "New England Women in Politics: A Regional Overview" and Margaret M. Conway "Women's Political Participation at the State and Local Level in the United States," *PS Political Science and Politics* (Jan 2004): 60–61.
29. Susan J. Carroll, "Women in State Government: Historical Overview and Current Trends." *The Book of the States*, 2004.
30. For further discussion on the importance of local government in general, see the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). "Increasing Women's' Participation in Municipal Decision Making." 2004. Accessed July 2006 from www.fcm.ca/english/policy/women.html.
31. Ibid.
32. Amy Caiazza, "Does Women's Representation in Elected Office Lead to Women-Friendly Policy?" IWPR #1902. 2002, and Margaret M. Conway, "Women's Political Participation at the State and Local Level in the United States."
33. Amy Caiazza, "Does Women's Representation in Elected Office Lead to Women-Friendly Policy?"
34. Emily Winter. "It's Kind of Lonely for Women in Politics Here. Only Three on City and Town Councils."*The Capital Times* (online edition), July 2006, Madison.