

Lawmaker Gender and Funding for K-12 Education: Who Supports Children More?

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Historically, sex has delineated policy preferences. It has also been a crucial element in bill sponsorship. Research has examined the behavior of male and female lawmakers and noted that female legislators tend to be relegated to “women’s issues” while male legislators have a more pronounced effect on economic policy. Although much literature has been devoted to gender and its effects on public policy, little research has analyzed gender differences in support for funding K-12 education. At this cross-section we see social welfare, which is typically regarded as a women’s issue, and economic policy. In this study, an examination of roll call votes from the California State Senate regarding K-12 appropriations was examined. Gender did not appear to be a statistically significant factor, though political party was.

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Introduction

A legislator's propensity to implement education policy can vary by circumstance. Decisions are based on a variety of reasons, including party affiliation, community stakeholders, advocacy groups, etc. However, several intrinsic factors also affect how a legislator supports policies. In my research, I examined the role of gender and its impact on support for funding K-12 educational policies; more specifically, does lawmaker gender affect public policies on funding K-12 education, and under what conditions? There is a need for research due to the current political atmosphere. Women now make up about 28% of United States elected offices, which is a slight drop from the previous congress (Pew Research, 2023). When we analyze women of color, the percentage drops further. Therefore, it is burdensome to state there is equity in our government. Delusion is personified by those within the political arena who dismiss claims of inequity and lack of representation. These individuals impede diversity and advancements in social progress.

Education, as we know, can empower and break cycles of detriment, all while facilitating upward mobility. There are current observational studies that recognize policy areas supported by women, areas that women consider consequential. The policies typically involve social welfare, for example, women's health, children, and education. Though in recent years, an extension of social welfare has included a broad range of issues about family and sex discrimination. Scholars have also examined substantive effects on policies and the attainment of descriptive representation. However, little research is done regarding lawmaker gender and support for education funding policies. The topic remains important because it analyzes the way lawmaker gender affects policy presentation and implementation.

The research question adds to the discussion on policy divergences among gender. It also illuminates various reasons for supporting (or not supporting) educational policies for example, political party and committee service.

The causal relationship is one between gender and support for public policy. I hypothesize that gender will affect the outcome of support for educational policies, as women support the right to education in higher numbers than their male counterparts. Both male and female legislators reside on both sides of the aisle, but men identify as more conservative. Conservative ideology is typified by several factors, but mainly fiscal conservatism and traditional social norms. Conservatives have also pursued the idea of privatizing education. Education is a foundational element in the principles of democracy and should be protected. In recent years, educational attainment among women has risen substantially, but not significantly enough. There are still many women who lack higher education due to societal norms and the archaic idea that women should remain at home raising children. One can argue that a correlation exists between women becoming more educated and women entering the political arena.

It is well known that policy preferences exist between genders, but I argue that women support policies for K-12 education funding more so than male lawmakers. Because men make up the bulk of elected officials within the United States, it can be said that support for educational policy is as important to men as to women. To some degree, this may be valid. My research analyzed proposed policies on appropriations for K-12 education. I examined seven California Senate bills and documented roll call votes among California state senators, specifically looking at gender, party, and committee service. Support was determined by a simple "aye" roll call vote.

Those against the senate bill proposing funding for K-12 education were determined by a “noe” or “NVR” (no vote recorded). The bills examined were from the years 1999-2004. These years were chosen because most bills were prior to the establishment of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), with one being the exception. The No Child Left Behind Act was a modern-day ploy to defund public education using accountability standards. This would later enable further distrust in public education.

Literature Review

A wealth of literature illustrates how male and female lawmakers differ in their legislative preferences and responsiveness. Research also analyzes how they prioritize specific issues. Party affiliation and constituent preferences often influence policy priorities while intrinsic factors, specifically race and class, remain alternative sources of influence. Vast research on descriptive and substantive representation examines how legislation is promulgated as white males have remained the majority demographic of Congress [since our nation’s indoctrination], with women and women of color significantly behind. However, literature regarding lawmaker gender and support for educational policies is lacking. Education, specifically appropriations for K-12 education, involves several facets of politics, such as social welfare, the economy, and civil liberties like equitable education. Education (especially fundamental education) has allowed for greater equality not only among the genders but also among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet, these issues prompt various responses from members of Congress. Whether the responses are driven by party, constituency, class, gender, or other factors remains convoluted. Therefore, by examining these factors while simultaneously addressing policy divergences, descriptive and substantive

representation, and legislative strategies, an educated portrait of legislative preferences [regarding lawmaker gender and support for funding K-12 educational policies] can be depicted.

Policy Divergences - Gender and Social Welfare “A Woman’s Issue”

To address policy divergences among male and female lawmakers, one must first understand that societal norms and stereotypes have infiltrated all avenues of the political process and those involved. Furthermore, gender remains the most significant disparity in political empowerment (Hessami and Fonseca, 2020). Gender stereotypes, though deemed an archaic construct, affect political representation, bill sponsorship, policy proposals, and support from constituents (Bauer, 2013). Even with political behavior constantly evolving, women are said to maintain certain policy positions. Scholars iterate that women serving in state legislatures focus particularly on women’s issues (Swers, 2001). Countless articles on gender and politics provide definitions of what is deemed a women’s issue. To some extent, they overlap, with the definition slightly varying depending on whether one chooses a traditional or modern lens. Traditionally, women’s issues were broad and involved children, education, women, and family. Modern women’s issues still focus on traditional categories like family and education, but have become more policy-specific. Examples of policy priorities include maternity leave and wage-related sex discrimination (Volden et al, 2013). In defining women’s issues, we see a broad generalization formed. Female legislators become associated with social welfare. Some scholars argue that women in general are said to have shared experiences that dictate legislative behavior (Barnello and Bratton, 2007). Others argue that women are not a monolithic group, and several cleavages divide them (Paxton et al, 2007).

Realistically, no single person can represent the interests of everyone. It is possible that a representative, male or female, can choose to support those they feel a kinship to (Barrett, 1995).

Men, however, lack this great unifier, yet they often have more in common with each other. The most common profession for male lawmakers is being an attorney, while the most common profession for female lawmakers is being a schoolteacher (Barrett, 1995). Race and district are often the highest influences on how a male legislator will sponsor an issue (Barnello and Bratton, 2007). Male-dominated legislatures follow gender stereotypes and relegate women to areas of social welfare while employment and the economy are male strongholds (Hessami and Fonseca, 2020). Research also shows that some male legislators focused on women's issues due to similar life experiences or because they have a political incentive to focus on such issues (Barnello and Bratton, 2007). For example, "...men who came of age during or after the 1960s may be less likely to adopt traditional roles, attitudes, and interests" (Barnello and Bratton, 2007).

Yet, some argue that gender stereotypes are self-reinforcing as women embody these expectations, allowing cyclical behavior (Bauer, 2013). Women were also noted to modulate their behavior to conceal gender differences (Barnello and Bratton, 2007). Vast bodies of literature associate political behavior with gender, but the lack of representation can falsely attribute differences to gender rather than other variables such as party and ideology (Hessami and Fonseca, 2020).

Policy Divergences - Party and Ideology

Several determinants affect a legislator's policy priority, but none more evident than the interests of the party and ideology. Partisanship naturally divides Congress and therefore divides policy preferences (Griffin et al, 2012). Democratic members of congress typically

lean more liberally which translates into greater support of social welfare issues, including education (Griffin et al, 2012). Redistribution of wealth and economic development (specifically upward mobility) also exist within the liberal agenda (Wolbrecht and Hartney, 2014).

Republican members are known to reside on the conservative spectrum, leading to policies that support fiscal conservatism and free market capitalism. As far as general ideological preferences, women were reported to be more liberal while men considered themselves conservative (Griffin et al, 2012). Though female legislators hold more liberal views on welfare, they reside on both sides of the aisle (Poggione, 2004). Female members of the GOP prioritize policies differently, making them an exception to their male counterparts. They tend to have more moderate views on conservatism, which makes their support for certain conservative policies less likely (Barnes and Cassese, 2017). Republican women are also prone to focus on traditional women's issues and issues feminist by nature (Barnello and Bratton, 2007).

Research shows that when a female legislator belongs to the majority party in Congress, their likelihood to pursue bills considered women's issues increases (Osborn, 2014). This increase leads to greater support of social welfare, including education. Moderate republican women used their ideology to cooperate with democratic women, abstaining from certain conservative policies (Osborn, 2014). Women also favor more development aid, more public expenditures on health, and less defense spending than men (Hessami and Fonseca, 2020). Female politicians in conservative districts were able to act on liberal welfare policies even while representing conservative constituencies (Poggione, 2004). Reelection remains the goal of any public servant; therefore, electoral accountability becomes an important component regardless of where one may lie party-wise.

Legislative Strategies - Constituents and Casework

Male and female lawmakers embrace a variety of legislative strategies to generate and pass legislation and seek reelection. Apart from utilizing gender and party alliance, lawmakers employ the constituency, committee service, policy niches, and specific power dynamics. A legislator's behavior is said to reflect their constituency composition, including sponsorship of specific measures (Barnello and Bratton, 2007). When addressing the constituency, female legislators expressly mentioned they represented women, more so than male legislators (Reingold, 1992).

African American were the anomaly as they were more similar to male African American legislators than white female legislators, and they were also more vocal in their support to help minorities yet less vocal in economic issues like taxes and state budget (Barrett, 1995). African American women were also strong advocates for casework (Barrett, 1995). Research states that constituency service, or casework, leads to higher levels of electoral success. Legislators engaging in casework were also said to value "... personal relations and helping others" (Richardson and Freeman, 1995). This adds to the notion that women are nurturers and [view political office as an extension of their roles as mothers and wives] (Schwindt-Bayer, 2006). However, even with women placing a higher emphasis on casework, they remain the political minority (Richardson and Freeman, 1995).

Male and female lawmakers actively engage their constituents, but as previously discussed, women prioritize constituency service more than men. Women also hold more liberal opinions of social welfare. This allows them to influence policy regardless of constituent ideology (Poggione, 2004). However, women in office tend to face more electoral competitiveness which can sometimes translate to conservative policy

support. The outcome means more collaboration with others within the party including support for policies presented by male leaders (Volden et. Al, 2013). These collaborations also lead female legislators to join or form a legislative committee.

Legislative Strategies - Committees and Policy a Niche

Committees benefit legislators in various ways. First, they allow the formation of alliances. Second, committees permit co-sponsorship activity. Third, they facilitate name recognition (Barrett, 1995). Nevertheless, committees require a legislator to organize policy agendas while in a group setting. Not all legislators are successful in their group efforts. Any sensible actor within the political sphere looking to enable their legislative agenda is cognizant of diplomacy, steering clear of any political faux pas (Reingold, 1996). This includes offending those you may need for assistance, typically senior members of a committee. Though male and female legislators are aware of this unspoken rule, women were reported to facilitate "consensus-building activities" and a more coordinated approach than male lawmakers (Jeydel and Taylor, 2003). This synchronized approach has allowed women in government to progress legislation with a higher output than male lawmakers. Women were also reported to introduce and pass legislation if they were supported by women's legislative caucuses (Thomas, 1991).

To enhance their political edge, female legislators maintain policy niches. This increases their recognition and allows them to successfully pass legislation (Barrett, 1995). For example, female African American lawmakers focus on education, healthcare, economic development, and employment. They also address issues of concern in the black community (Barrett, 1995). Female state legislators, coordinated in their efforts, distinguish themselves by dedicating special attention to the interests of

women, children, and families (Swers, 2001).

Legislative Strategies - The Power Dynamic

Some research states that male and female lawmakers differ in their power techniques to obtain policy goals (Reingold, 1996). These power dynamics are explained via feminist theory. Men are said to have a “power over” leadership style while women have a “power to” leadership style (Reingold, 1996). This theory states that men utilize power to control and distribute shared resources while the feminine “power to” leadership style empowers and is more egalitarian and compromising (Reingold, 1996). This explanation of behavior adds to existing literature on female legislators and policy priorities.

Women focus on case work, encourage collaboration in the legislature, and support social welfare policies. They also prioritize bills pertaining to education, women, and healthcare (Paxton et al, 2007). Men seek to exert power when establishing policies. In doing so, they fail to acknowledge those the policy may affect (Schwindt-Bayer, 2006). The different approaches are evident when examining economic and education policy. Women favor more redistribution, while polices like No Child Left Behind have pushed to privatize education and promote neoliberal and conservative solutions to societal problems (Hursh, 2007).

The push to privatize education came from both the republican and democratic party and from both male and female lawmakers. Therefore, one must wonder if factors other than gender and ideology impact policy-making decisions. This contradicts the idea of descriptive representation translating to substantive representation. Nevertheless, scholars argue that as the number of women increase in government, women have more opportunities to impact legislation (Hessami and Fonseca, 2020).

Gender Parity- More Women More Impact?

Normative democratic theorists assert that a legislature earns its legitimacy when a government resembles the characteristics of its people (Bauer, 2013). With a country like the United States, descriptive representation affords its diverse citizens, whether male or female, a chance to permeate the political sphere and discourse. At its core, descriptive representation should translate to a production of policies benefiting said citizens. However, the ongoing lack of diversity within our institutions has led to slow growth.

For women, descriptive representation remains a necessity as gender operates as a heuristic in voting (Bauer, 2013). According to a study examining the level of support from constituents, “...women [stand out] as the most supportive constituency group for female officials” (Reingold, 1992). Feminist scholars also assert that an increase of women in state legislatures is needed to expand women’s interests (Swers, 2005). Since women weren’t given the opportunity to partake in politics as early as their male counterparts, academics state it is difficult to assess their full impact. In fact, research on female lawmakers and gender parity did not exist until roughly the 1970s and 1980s, which leaves more room for speculation (Thomas, 1991). Early research even characterized women as newcomers as opposed to the already established male legislators (Cammisa and Reingold, 2004). It is because of these factors that the examination of legislative preferences among genders remains ongoing.

Research examining the lower house legislatures in twelve states (including California) stated that women introduced an average of .35 more bills pertaining to children and women than men (Thomas and Welch, 1991). This evidence supports the argument that descriptive representation does translate to substantive

representation and that female lawmakers improve institutional quality via social welfare. Some argue that the connection between descriptive and substantive representation is premature. Others maintain that gender differences diminished as the percentage of female legislators increased [due to male lawmakers supporting legislation on women's issues] (Paxton et al, 2007). There are other research interests that completely refute descriptive representation stating, "...social identity is irrelevant to the representation of constituency interests" (Swers, 2005). Though the debate on representation is ongoing, there is a shared sentiment of political exclusion among women (Baur, 2013). It is because of these reasons that women support fundamental and higher education as it is a tool of social mobility.

Supporters of Education Policy

As mentioned earlier in the literature, women were characterized by their support for social welfare, including support for education (Barnello and Bratton, 2007). Yet, elementary and secondary education systems are constantly under attack by those who push to privatize education (Hursh, 2007). These forces, mainly neoliberal economists and republican conservatives, perpetuate an alternate reality that portrays public education as a free-for-all system lacking accountability. Challenges to fundamental education have been ongoing. Republican President Ronald Regan proposed ending the Department of Education in 1980 (Hursh, 2007). The "America 2000" bill proposed by Republican President George H.W. Bush also sought to reform education by providing vouchers for private schools (Hursh, 2007). Democratic President Bill Clinton also attempted to pass legislation to reform public education under the Educate American Act (2000). This act was also a ploy to deem public education as insufficient leading to the "solution" of privatization (Hursh, 2007).

All these factors led to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) enacted by President George W. Bush. However, the push to privatize education did not stop there, even President Barrack Obama promoted the "Race to the Top Initiative" (Hursh, 2007). It is because of these factors that women appear to be more in line with public education efforts.

Discussion

After examining policy divergences, legislative strategies, and descriptive and substantive representation, differences were noted among male and female legislators. Male legislators tend to lean conservatively while favoring topics involving employment, the economy, and overall fiscal conservatism (Griffin et al, 2012). They were also known to maintain a separate "power over" leadership style which seeks to control resources and relegate women to issues of social welfare (Reingold, 1996). Male legislators were only found to be supportive of women's issues if they had similar life experiences, or if they had political incentive to do so (Barnello and Bratton, 2007).

Although both male and female legislators actively engaged their constituents, women were noted to stress the importance of casework in higher numbers than men (Richardson and Freeman, 1995). Men were hesitant to overtly support any specific group. Female lawmakers openly admitted to supporting women, women's issues, and issues of social welfare (Swers, 2001). Higher female representation has enriched political institutions as women generally favor redistribution in greater numbers (Hessami and Fonseca 2020). This had led to substantial investments in education despite several attacks from neoliberal and conservative men. Lack of research on gender parity and legislative preferences does not allow for a resolute answer on whether male legislators will support appropriations for K-12 education in higher numbers than their female counterparts.

However, male lawmakers have been active in politics longer than women, therefore, it is sufficient to say that support for social welfare can be equally attributed to men.

Methodology

For my thesis, I utilized a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between the gender of legislators and its effect on support for K-12 education funding policies. This was the most effective method as I sought to examine data from the California State Legislature, specifically roll call votes. The bills I assessed purposely addressed K-12 because college-aged children are viewed differently on a dependent scale. Legally, those who are over the age of eighteen are considered adults.

After examining the K-12 education funding bills proposed by the California State Senate, between the period of 1999-2004, I expected gender to affect the roll call vote of the legislator. I believed that female legislators would support K-12 education funding policies more than their male counterpart. The expectation was that women would support these policies in a greater capacity due to traditional norms and societal expectations. As noted, earlier literature mentioned women prioritize social welfare policies and issues like education in higher numbers than men. Women were also perceived as nurturers who advocate for women and children. Lastly, women were identified as engaging in cyclical behaviors due to societal and constituent demands.

Although gender was the primary variable, I was also intrigued by other factors that appeared significant within the literature. Therefore, I added control variables like party and committee. I compiled my data using information from the California State Legislature's website. Here I conducted a text search of senate bills using the key words "K-12", "education", and "funding".

Most (with the exception of one) of the bills examined were from 1999-2001 for a few reasons: First, these years were prior to the establishment of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). Second, during this period there was a democratic president. Third, this was as far back as the website would allow. I did select one bill from the year 2004 pertaining to K-12 education funding to see if there was a difference in support after the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and during a republican presidency.

I examined a total of seven bills. Within each bill, under the "votes" tab, there is a list of roll call votes from each legislator that voted on the policy. The roll call vote will form my dependent variable. The website separated the votes by ayes, noes, and NVR (no vote recorded). The data was arranged by variables. I created a spreadsheet itemizing each bill and each legislator that voted on the bill. I added the following variables: Vote, gender, party, and committee. The variables were coded as such: Votes were coded as a "1" if the legislator supported the policy and voted with an "aye". If a legislator voted against the bill or declined to vote (NVR) the vote would be coded as a "0". Gender, which is the independent variable, was coded as "1" for female legislators and "0" for male legislators. Party was coded as a "1" for democrat and a "0" for non-democrat. Committee was coded as a "1" if the legislator served or previously served on an education committee and a "0" if they did not. The following senate bills pertaining to appropriations for K-12 education were examined: SB-751 (40 votes), SB-356 (38 votes), SB-1870 (22 votes), SB-747 (39 votes), SB-57 (39 votes), SB-6 (39 votes), and SB-855 (38 votes). This was a total of 261 observations.

All seven bills contributed to some form of funding for K-12 education, yet they were all a little different.

The first senate bill (SB-751) sought to establish a commission on community service that would provide a variety of community service programs. The bill offered school-based service learning for grades K-12. The commission would also serve as an advisory board to the governor. The second senate bill (SB-356) would reimburse school districts for state-imposed mandates. The bill would also require the Department of Fair Employment and Housing to amend their current poster on employment discrimination allowing parents and legal guardians the right to take time off to participate in their dependent's activities for school. The third senate bill (SB-1870), which received the least number of votes from legislators, would require the Office of Emergency Services to initiate a pilot program for the purpose of earthquake safety within public schools. This program, according to the bill, would analyze non-structural elements within schools for the purpose of establishing a strategy reduce the risk of injury from falling and moving objects. The fourth bill (SB-747) would require police officers serving in K-12 public schools, to successfully complete basic training before "...exercising powers as a police officer". The fifth bill (SB-57) would coincide with the Santa Monica Restoration Project. Under this project, K-12 schools would receive increased education concerning the Santa Monica Bay. According to SB-757, the definition of increased education includes, "...assuring ocean resources are accessible to all Californians regardless of socioeconomic status..." and preserving oceans to enhance for future generations. The sixth bill (SB-6) proposed to limit reductions to revenue limits. Though this bill mainly applied to the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) it positively affected school budgets by giving additional general-purpose revenues to school districts. The final bill (SB-855) would include childcare or community care facilities labeled as "crisis nurseries" to

receive reimbursement due to state-mandated provisions. This bill would also discontinue appropriations from the general fund to Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care (AFDC-FC) due to existing federal and county funding. The AFDC-FC program provides aid to foster care children.

The initial research goal was to examine enacted K-12 education funding legislation from the period of 1975-2023. This was partially due to the lack of female representation prior to 1975, and I was interested to see how the female dynamic has changed as more women have entered the political sphere. However, due to the lack of results regarding proposed education policies on the California State Legislature website prior to the year 1999, I chose to address the years from 1999-2004.

I expected to see a statistical significance among female legislator's support for K-12 education funding policies. I also expected that male legislator's support for K-12 policies would not be statistically significant. However, when controlling for party identification, I presumed an increased probability among male democrats. Statistical significance was also assumed for both male and female legislators belonging to an education committee.

Results

The focus of this research was to uncover gender differences among male and female legislators within the California State Senate and their support for funding K-12 education policies. As discussed earlier in the paper, I anticipated that gender would be a determining factor, and female legislators would support K-12 education funding policies in higher numbers than their male counterpart. Through my quantitative approach and with the assistance of the statistical computing software R, I ran a logistic regression analyzing the roll-call votes of male and female legislators.

Table 1 highlights the results from my analysis. I was able to ascertain that gender is a non-determining factor which did not support my hypothesis. Also, the results of the dependent variable committee, did differ from the expectation. Party did prove to be significant while committee was not.

As we see in Table 1, gender was noted to move in a positive direction with a coefficient of .01, but did not meet the significance level. This indicated that gender did not affect the votes of the educational policies. Party, also moving in a positive direction with a .33 coefficient, shows statistical significance at the one percent level. The results regarding party did align with extant research as democratic ideology tends to lean liberally on the political spectrum translating to greater support of public goods. The dependent variable committee, though stronger than gender with a .03 coefficient, did not reach significance. This finding was unusual because several of the legislators from the sample were involved in committees on education. It was also assumed that those on education committees would support K-12 education funding policies in higher numbers than those who were not on committees.

The legislators involved in the study included a total of 14 female legislators and 45 male legislators. When accounting for party overall, 25 members were republican, and 33 members were democrats. The majority of the female legislators were democrats with only one serving as a member of the republican party. The males in the group appeared to be a relatively even split, around 21 male legislators were democrats, and 24 male legislators were republican. The total amount of legislators on an educational committee was 21 this involved 7 female legislators and 14 male legislators.

When exploring each policy individually, we do see significance in over half of the bills examined. Table 2 shows the vote impact per bill.

The first bill, showing significance at the 1 percent level, is SB-356 with a coefficient of -0.30. As discussed earlier, SB-356 involved components other than K-12 funding in its policy proposal. It also requested the amendment of employment discrimination posters. The posters were to include information on leave for parents and guardians if they needed time away from work for dependent's school activities. This specific bill was proposed by female legislator. I believe it carried significance because it covered a variety of factors including employment and fiscal policy.

	Vote
PolicySB-356	-0.30***
	(0.09)
PolicySB-57	-0.31***
	(0.09)
PolicySB-6	0.07
	(0.09)
PolicySB-747	0.04
	(0.09)
PolicySB-751	-0.36***
	(0.09)
PolicySB-855	-0.21**
PolicySB-1870	(0.09),0.01, (0.09)
Gender	0.03
	(0.05)
Party	0.32***
	(0.05)
Constant	0.73***
	(0.08)
N	261
R2	0.31
Adjusted R2	0.29
Residual Std. Error	0.35 (df = 252)
F Statistic	14.16*** (df = 8; 252)
Notes:	***Significant at the 1 percent level.
	**Significant at the 5 percent level.
	*Significant at the 10 percent level.

The next bill to maintain significance at the one percent level was SB-57. As seen in Table 2, this policy moved in a negative direction with a coefficient of -0.31. The bill had a combination of various interests. In addition to including an education element to teach children about the importance of our oceans, it also served as a water restoration project addressing the health of Santa Monica Bay. When we look at the broad areas of policy associated with this bill, we see environmental policy and education. It also includes a component on classist discrimination as the policy states that in addition to teaching children about ocean preservation, it will also advise that ocean resources are for all Californians regardless of socioeconomic status.

The next strongly significant policy with a negative coefficient of -0.36 was SB-751. This bill, significant at the one percent level, sought to establish a commission on community service and a school-based learning service. The commission on community service would advise the governor on needed programs and add volunteer programs to the community. Both SB-751 and SB-57 were introduced by male legislator. After looking at the micro components of this bill, it appeared to be significant because it also touched on other areas including crime prevention and substance abuse within local communities.

The last bill to involve some form of statistical significance was SB-855. The coefficient for this policy was -0.21. It was significant at the 5 percent level. The most distinguishing part of this bill involved reduced appropriations for Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care (AFDC-FC). The bill noted that since the federal government and local counties were providing funding, there was adequate support. It purposely stated that additional appropriations from the California's general fund were not needed. This policy also had the least amount of roll call votes with ten of its votes being NVR.

Out of the seven bills examined, only four maintained statistical significance. Ironically, the other three bills that were not statistically significant directly impacted schools and educators. Two of the senate bills dealt with elements of school safety; SB-747 required basic training for peace officers in schools. It also stated that a special certificate would be needed to prior to utilizing tear gas. The second bill, SB-1870 requested to initiate a seismic safety pilot for non-structural elements in schools. The third bill (SB-6) dealt with cuts to PERS (Public Employees).

	Vote
PolicySB-356	-0.30***
	(0.09)
PolicySB-57	-0.31***
	(0.09)
PolicySB-6	0.07
	(0.09)
PolicySB-747	0.04
	(0.09)
PolicySB-751	-0.36***
	(0.09)
PolicySB-855	-0.21**
PolicySB-1870	(0.09), 0.01, (0.09)
Gender	0.03
	(0.05)
Party	0.32***
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Retirement System) but allotted additional general-purpose revenues to school districts. These factors could be indicators of why the bills were not statistically significant.

The policies that proved significant all had a unifying element as well. They did not deal directly with K-12 education. The bills influenced other policy areas like the economy, for instance, how much is deducted and contributed to the California general fund. The bills also dealt with issues like crime, homelessness, and community service. Some of the policies also appeared to advocate for environmental concerns like ocean clean-up activities. This was interesting because it appeared that male legislators (who were the bulk of the sample) promote policies that appear to benefit K-12 education but rather promote other areas of interest.

Though gender was found to be a non-determining factor, the vote impact per policy was telling of what education policies garnered support from legislators. Some bills appeared to have "logroll" situations where multiple issues were crowded into one specific bill. This could explain why certain policies received higher amounts of support than others. In fact, this would support the argument in the literature that states alliances allow for co-sponsorship activity.

Committees typically account for group support of a policy. However, legislators belonging to an education committee accounted for 38% of the sample. This equated to 98 of the 260 observations. Consequently, it was not surprisingly that committee was not a significant factor.

This study is not without its limitations. First, the legislators and polices examined were specific to a heavily democratic California. Democratic men accounted for the majority of the legislators within the sample. Republican men were the second greatest population.

Female legislators, both democrats and republicans, accounted for only 26% of the sample. To accurately depict the effects of female sponsorship on K-12 education funding policies, a larger sample of female legislators or a higher number of observations from various senate bills would be needed. This could be done by utilizing roll call votes on the California State Legislature website from various time periods when female membership within the state senate was prominent.

Another possible solution to rectify this limitation would be to examine female sponsorship across the California State Assembly. Within this research, only members of the California State Senate were addressed as the bills examined were senate bills. Additional observations from the state assembly could also have an impact on the results reported because the state assembly has a higher population of legislators. If observations were taken from female legislators across both entities, this would allow for supplementary observations, and a clearer impact of female representation.

Because California is primarily liberal and democratic, the study could benefit from diversity. This could be done by capturing roll call votes across a variety of state legislatures. This might include both liberal and conservative states but could also benefit from all liberal or all conservative as the purpose is to address support for education funding policies. By obtaining these observations, additional inferences can be made on a variety of different factors that may impact vote like party, constituency, committee service, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

Though gender was a non-determining factor, we cannot draw any conclusions due to the limitations of the study. The lack of gender parity in the state senate (at the time of these bill proposals) and the limited observations have surely affected the outcome.

In the results of the individual policies, we see hints of gender differences, but not large enough to infer significance. If given an unlimited number of resources (and time), I would be interested in assessing the role that gender plays in K-12 education since the start of female participation in government. California was one of the earliest states to allow women the right to vote and to participate in government, yet there was still a lack of representation until 1975. Also, research on gender politics did not formally commence until the late 1970s.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to uncover whether gender played a determining factor in support for K-12 education funding policies. My hypothesis stated that gender would affect the outcome of support with female legislators favoring education funding policies in higher numbers than male legislators. Though the results of my research indicated gender was a non-determining factor, the policies analyzed did spark dialogue. The bills that were deemed statistically significant had several other policy areas intertwined with K-12 funding. These policy areas included fiscal, environmental, and security interests. The policies that definitively involved K-12 education were not considered statistically significant.

The lack of female lawmakers in the sample was a major limitation of my research. Female lawmakers only accounted for 26% of the sample while males, both democratic and republican, accounted for most of the observations. The lack of gender diversity within the sample could account for the null hypothesis. Though it is difficult to say without sufficient data.

Deepening our understanding of female participation in government remains crucial as sex continues to delineate policy preferences.

This specific area of research focused on support for K-12 education policies as education is the foundation for social mobility. One can see a correlation between women becoming more educated and women's participation in government. The area of education does not only benefit women but also those from disadvantaged backgrounds. If education is forced to privatize as many male lawmakers hope, we will surely see a decrease in diversity within government.

The opposition to education is not the only obstacle that women face. Women also face other obstacles when attempting to become politically active. Men relegate women to areas of social welfare due to traditional views and social norms. Culprits also include constituents, as they are likely to push back on candidates who differ from traditional expectations. This forces women to engage in cyclical behavior only reinforcing normative stereotypes. Because of this, the effect of women on government can become convoluted.

Though we see specific trends, it is difficult to assess women's participation in government when research has been limited to the past fifty years. Additionally, women did not make a notable appearance in government until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Over the years, we see female representation increasing, leading to an effect in policies. Along with female participation in government, women's issues have also developed over time. Policies have become more specific than the general realms of family, health, and children. Women's issues, through a modern lens, include sex discrimination in pay, childcare laws, the right to an abortion, and higher education.

Numerous differences were noted between male and female lawmakers, but none more evident than their leadership styles. Women, known for their collaborative efforts, view power as tool rather than a trophy.

This allows them to promulgate legislation via collaborative efforts. Although this may seem like a benefit, some forms of collaboration can lead female legislators to acquiesce, further aligning with social norms. Women then become amenable to policies that act against their interests. I believe it is at this divide where descriptive representation does not translate to substantive representation.

Female African American lawmakers were the anomaly. Their involvement in politics shows evidence of substantive representation. They were also more comparable to male African American legislators than to white female legislators. In fact, this was the only example of females nearly aligning with males. This data supports the need for further research in female politics.

As noted in the literature (and sample), male legislators still hold most government positions. Part of being the majority has affected the amount of legislation advancing women's issues. This has caused certain liberties, like the right to education, to come under fire. Democratic and republican administrations continuously push to privatize education, but schools are tools for equity and social mobility. Schools are also political institutions which have allowed women to enter government in large numbers. Therefore, education seems to be attacked by the same men that seek to relegate women to areas of social welfare.

The basis for my argument is rooted in the idea that women act on their matronly predisposition imposed by society. However, I do not think that education should be characterized as a policy area that women support because it is labeled as social welfare. Women are half of the population. As such, they should be allowed to enter government in the same numbers as men and decide what policies they choose to support without receiving backlash from members of their party, committee, or members of the constituency.

It is well-known that gender research in politics is a relatively new construct. Current research has identified various factors that influence policy priorities like descriptive representation and legislative strategies, but further research is still needed to address gender disparities as it pertains to effectiveness of government. Also, as diversity grows within political offices, we should also seek to analyze social identity and behavioral traits. By understanding these factors, we can determine what prompts legislative behavior among the sexes and other diverse groups within government.

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The Politics of Knowledge: Epistemic Violence and Colonial Subjugation in the USA and Philippines

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This thesis examines how the United States, in both the Philippines' classic colonial project and the United States settler colonial project, has worked to erase Indigenous epistemologies. Using a decolonial lens, I explore how education, language suppression, and other forms of control were used not only to dominate but to reshape the identities of Indigenous peoples. Drawing from different decolonial theorists, I examine how colonial systems devalued Indigenous knowledge. However, this is also a story of resistance. Through case studies such as the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project and the Lumad STEM curriculum in the Philippines, I highlight how Indigenous communities reclaim knowledge, identity, and self-determination on their terms. This project asserts that knowledge and education can be both a stage of oppression and a powerful tool of resistance.

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Introduction:

In recent years, attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the United States have escalated through legislative, judicial, and executive efforts. From military institutions to classrooms, the removal of any content related to DEI has accelerated. At the beginning of 2025, for example, 381 books were removed from the U.S. Naval Academy's Nimitz Library due to DEI-related content. (Ismay 2025). Among these books are "Memorializing the Holocaust," Janet Jacobs's examination of depictions of women in the Holocaust; "How Racism Takes Place," by George Lipsitz; "The Myth of Equality," by Ken Wytsma; studies of the Ku Klux Klan; the history of lynching in America; and May Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (Ismay 2025). While supporters of anti-DEI policies argue that these aim to reverse violations of free speech, break anti-discrimination laws, and stop the misuse of money (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2025). I argue that they are a part of a broader issue of suppressing important historical narratives and perspectives that address topics such as systemic inequalities, white supremacy, racism, etc. Regardless of the administration's reasoning for DEI attacks, the erasure of marginalized knowledge and experiences exposes the prevalence of knowledge suppression in the United States.

From the words of Sydney J. Harris, "History repeats itself, but in such cunning disguise that we never detect the resemblance until the damage is done" (Black, Heath, and Swanson 2025). These efforts echo the longstanding colonial tools of epistemic erasure in line with the United States' colonialism in the Philippines during the early 1900s and the U.S. settler colonial project, which is the central focus of my thesis. As colonialism manifests in many different forms of domination and control, therefore, it is essential to understand the different methods that

the United States has exercised. The colonial education system was a key aspect of United States colonialism in both projects, which played a central role in shaping US colonial relationships and reinforcing racial hierarchies.

In the early 1600s, British colonization began in the United States, establishing settlements linked to their parent state (Saito 2020, 42). From its conception, it was centered around territorial acquisition and the goal to destroy and replace (Saito 2020, 43; Saranillo 2015, 284). While classic colonialism, on the other hand, involves the subjugation of one people to another (Kohn 2006) mainly through the manipulation and transformation according to the needs and interests of the colonizer (Saito 2020, 43), settler colonialism differs through settlement and the erasure or replacement of Indigenous peoples. Both systems aim to attain control over land, resources, and people.

A hallmark of European and later United States colonialism has also been civilizing missions (Saito 2020, 28), which served as justification for the subjugation and erasure of Indigenous peoples. Epistemic, another central aspect, deals with the role of power, institutions, and practices in the production and erasure of knowledge and how knowledge is mobilized and controlled (James 2024). In other words, the struggle over how knowledge is produced, what knowledge is considered valid, and what knowledge will be recognized and remembered is a deeply political process. In both colonial projects, Western or Eurocentric knowledge and perspective were viewed as legitimate by the colonizers, while Indigenous knowledge and ways of life were labeled as inferior, backwards, etc. Through the treatment of Native Americans and later the Philippine Natives, the United States exemplified racist ideologies that manifested in colonial education systems (Tuck and Yang 2012). As I will argue in my later chapters, epistemic

politics was an important mechanism of colonialism and therefore necessitates epistemic disobedience and decolonization to overturn these colonial systems (Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird 2012).

As colonialism focuses on civilizing through destroying and replacing the knowledge and culture of indigenous societies, a decolonial lens to delink from colonial knowledge is vital. Decolonial theory is critical to understanding U.S. colonialism, as it focuses on different aspects, such as the effects of colonialism, including identity formation and resistance. By analyzing the history of colonial practices in both the U.S. and the Philippines, I will explore their impacts on Indigenous knowledge systems, identity formation, and resistance methods. Therefore, in the following chapters, I will answer this question: How has epistemic genocide shaped U.S. colonial relations through the classic colonial project in the Philippines and the settler colonial project in the U.S.? How have these projects shaped Indigenous identity, and if they parallel one another, how might they inform contemporary resistance methods? To answer this question, I will examine both U.S. colonial projects through a decolonial lens to challenge dominant Western epistemology and the narratives that have historically silenced or erased marginalized voices. A decolonial lens is central to this project because it allows me to critically analyze the unique challenges faced by Indigenous peoples.

In chapter one, I will present my analytical framework of decolonial theory guiding this thesis and the concepts I will focus on in my later chapters based on this framework. I will also present my methodological commitments and roadmap for my next chapters. In chapter two, I will provide a historical overview of the beginning of U.S. colonialism in both colonial projects

to provide a historical foundation for the rest of the thesis and examine the contextual differences while highlighting similar colonial and racial logic underlying both projects. Decolonial theorists such as Walter D. Mignolo and Santiago Castro-Gómez, for example, critically inform chapter three as I examine epistemic genocide and epistemicide as a central aspect of U.S. colonialism. Their work guides my examination of the dominant Western and Eurocentric epistemologies, which were imposed through different methods.

Chapter four will then focus on identity formation through a decolonial lens, drawing on scholars such as Frantz Fanon and his theory of internalized inferiority and the colonial gaze, as well as Glen Coulthard's critique of recognition politics and Anibal Quijano's coloniality of power. These thinkers help examine how colonial projects not only erased Indigenous epistemologies but also deeply affected Indigenous identities. Finally, chapter five focuses on Indigenous resistance, utilizing Coulthard's theory of grounded normativity and Renato Constantino's call for Filipino-centered education as a form of epistemic resistance. Their work shapes my analysis as they reject seeking validation or recognition from the colonial power but focus on land-based practices and educational recollection.

The structure of this thesis as a comparative analysis of both colonial projects is also rooted in my decolonial commitment to recognizing the distinct historical and cultural aspects of each colonial context and analyzing shared logics, patterns, and consequences of U.S. colonialism. I will also utilize historical texts and archives and case studies like the Luman community school system and the Wampanoag Language Reclamation Project to center the lived experiences and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples.

My thesis, therefore, examines how epistemic genocide shaped U.S. colonial relations by analyzing the U.S.-Philippines colonial project and the U.S.-Native American settler-colonial project through a decolonial lens. By comparing both colonial projects, this thesis examines the role of racist ideologies and epistemic genocide in these civilizing missions, as the U.S.-Philippines classic colonial project echoed the ideology and methods behind the U.S. settler colonial project.

**Chapter One: Decolonizing Knowledge -
Theoretical and Methodological
Foundations:**

In chapter one, I establish the theoretical and methodological framework for the rest of this thesis by introducing the core political theory concepts that guide my analysis of knowledge erasure and its role in shaping indigenous identity and resistance. In this chapter, I argue that a true understanding of the erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing within both the United States settler colonial project and the classical colonial project requires a decolonial lens. Through this lens, I analyze how knowledge erasure, identity formation, and resistance are interconnected and how epistemic defiance is critical. I draw on theorists such as Franz Fanon, Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, and Santos Castro Gomez, whose crucial concepts, such as colonial identity and zero-point epistemology, for example, demonstrate how colonial systems have dominated and erased Indigenous epistemologies. I reconstruct these concepts to build the foundation of my analytical framework that guides the following chapters. Each section of this chapter introduces a core theoretical concept that will guide the analysis in one of the following chapters. I will then outline my methodological commitments, including my choices in political artifacts and the voices I choose to center. I will show how these different concepts and commitments fit together

in my analytical framework and reinforce epistemic defiance, a central aspect driving this project. Ultimately, this chapter provides a clear roadmap for how theory and methodological commitments shape my thesis.

*Section 1: Decolonial Theory and
Epistemic Violence:*

As colonizers have always controlled knowledge production, decolonial theory focuses on challenging Western epistemology and the narratives that perpetuate colonial ideologies.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge that investigates and distinguishes “belief from opinion” (Million 2015, 339) or, in other words, what knowledge and truth are accepted and perpetuated. The Western notion of epistemology is rooted in the foundational belief of superior knowledge that denies other societies the act of creation and interpretation (Million 2015, 339). This notion is rooted in superiority, which is based on racial superiority and is therefore prevalent throughout both colonial projects, whose foundation rests on the supposed superiority of American knowledge, politics, and ways of life. Epistemology is inherently political because power structures and social institutions have always shaped knowledge.

As Charles Mills accounts in *The Racial Contract*, “the system of domination by which white people have historically ruled over and...continue to rule over non-white people” (Mills 1997, 1) is inherently political. He also highlights how the racial contract is epistemological as it “requires its own peculiar moral and empirical epistemology, its norms and procedures for determining what counts as moral and factual knowledge of the world” (Mills 1997, 17). Because epistemology is central to this social system of domination, systematic knowledge erasure was central to the colonial domination that surpassed physical domination. Historically, power structures, socioeconomic privileges, benefits, rights, etc.,