A SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN U.S. STATE LEGISLATURES

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Abstract: This thesis explores two central questions. (1) Does early political socialization have an impact on political ambition? (2) What explains the underrepresentation of women in state legislatures across the country? I hypothesize that if girls are politically socialized at an early age, then we should see nascent political ambition in them (manifested in the desire to run for executive seats in college council elections). I then use this early political socialization measure along with five other independent variables (family/gender roles, state political culture, legislative professionalism, term limits, and partisan composition of the constituency) and run linear regressions to ascertain which is most statistically significant in explaining underrepresentation of women across U.S. state legislatures. Central findings of the study show that little to no early political socialization takes place in the United States and that the greatest explanatory power of underrepresentation of women in state legislatures is still family/gender roles and partisan composition of the constituency.