

POLITICAL-BASED VARIANCE IN FEMALE-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT
ACROSS THE UNITED STATES: EFFECTS ON THE JUSTICE
PROCESS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

by
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ABSTRACT

In the United States today, sexual assault is a crime that appears to flourish in certain social settings, institutions, and areas. Rape culture, which trivializes sexual violence and perpetuates rape myths, appears to be prevalent in these settings. In this paper, I explore these settings with a broader term: female-friendly environment. A female-friendly environment supports the equality, well-being, and empowerment of women; lacks societal attitudes of male dominance and superiority over women, and does not tolerate acts of violence against women. First, I analyze how partisanship contributes to female-friendly environment at the state level; more specifically, how political conservatism leads to the shaping of a social and political environment that is either ambivalent or hostile towards women. Second, I show the relationship between female-friendly environment and arrests for the crime of sexual assault. Lastly, I connect political conservatism to more arrests for sexual assault, due to “tough on crime” policies. This paper demonstrates the nuanced relationship between political conservatism, female-friendly environment, and arrests for sexual assault. Furthermore, it reveals the strength of the association between women’s reproductive health policy and sexual assault, and the negative effects this association has on the justice system.

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Introduction

As a woman and as a professional advocate for victims of sexual assault, I have experienced the aftereffects of sexual assault first hand. I have seen victims forced to confront the reality of living in a place where rape culture pervades the justice process and social system around them. I have seen it in the perpetuation of age-old rape myths, in cases like that of Brock Turner, in the glorification of violence against women in the media, and in my own personal interactions with individuals within the law enforcement system. Rape culture is a belief, arguably inherent within American societal and legal structures, that promotes the normalization or trivialization of sexual assault. Rape culture can be subtle: rape jokes, pop songs, and commercials can push this underlying message. It can also take more serious forms that promote further sexual violence. It has the potential to diminish the chance of victims receiving justice after being sexually assaulted and points to failures within the justice system of the United States to support the victim. Ultimately, rape culture serves the underlying purpose of perpetuating the system of political and social patriarchy within the United States. I believe that the prevalence of rape culture correlates with the level of female-friendly culture within a state. Female-friendly culture exists in environments where women are valued and encouraged to pursue economic, political, and social opportunities and to feel safe from crimes that are typically oriented towards female victims, like that of sexual assault. On the other hand, places that lack a female-friendly culture see higher disparities in gender equality, attitudes and policies that support the subordination of women, and greater amounts of gender-based crime and violence.

This study explores the variation in female-friendly environment across the United States, including the principal determinant in this analysis: political conservatism. I also analyze the impacts of political conservatism and female-friendly environment on arrest numbers for the

crime of rape. This study provides insight into the complex and interconnected relationship between female-friendly environment, conservatism, and how our justice system is vulnerable to these elements at an institutional level. This study has policy implications that will enable our justice system to more effectively protect victims of sexual assault.

Literature Review

The Issue of Sexual Assault

In 2015, there were 431,837 instances of sexual assault in the United States, a number that also includes rapes that were not reported to police (Bureau of Justice Statistics). One out of every six women and one out of every thirty-three men have been the victim of attempted or completed rape in the United States at some point in their life (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998). Furthermore, nine out of every ten victims of rape are female (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998). While men are certainly victimized as well, sexual assault tends to be a gendered crime.

The crime of intimate sexual assault is also tied to geographic location and region, as findings show that most victimizations occur in suburban and urban areas (Rennison et al 2012, 286). In 2016, the Northeast portion of the United States had a reported rape rate of 29.6 per 100,000 inhabitants, while the Midwest had a rate of 46.2 per 100,000 (U.S. Department of Justice). Some areas may see better law enforcement efforts at tackling the crime of sexual assault. A study of data from 2003-2012 found that certain regions within the United States had higher proportions of rape cases leading to arrest, such as the Pacific Northwest and the Florida Panhandle (Amin et al., 2015). Other regions, like the Southwest and upper Northeast, saw the opposite effect (Amin et al., 2015). These variations also occur at the state level.

Rape is also the most underreported crime in the country, with 63% of completed rapes not being reported to police (Rennison 2002). In 2016, only .3 victimizations of sexual assault per 1,000 persons (age 12 and older) were reported to police, while .9 victimizations remained not reported to police (Morgan and Kena, 2017, 8). Out of every 1000 rapes, 994 perpetrators will walk free (RAINN The Criminal). Even after victims of sexual assault report their crime and decide to begin the justice process, it is unlikely that their offenders will ever receive

punishment. This study focuses on the variables that contribute to the above-mentioned statistics in our country.

Rape Culture

One factor that contributes to the issue of sexual assault within the United States is rape culture, which I believe is also connected to how “friendly” an environment is towards women. Rape culture is an umbrella phrase coined by American feminists in the 1970s that refers to beliefs and attitudes that normalize sexual violence and lead to the perpetuation of rape, particularly against women (WAVAW). More practically, this occurs through blaming victims of sexual assault, sympathizing with rapists, trivializing rape, perpetuating rape jokes and myths, etc. These attitudes and behaviors occur at an individual, societal, and institutional level within the United States. American society also promotes myths and narratives about rape through television shows and films, songs, and news media coverage of sexual crimes.

In recent decades, the scholarly community has begun to study the phenomenon of rape culture and the crisis of sexual violence in the United States. For example, Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald identified the different types of rape myths, such as “she asked for it”, “he didn’t mean to”, “she wanted it”, and “she lied” (1999). Another aspect of rape culture includes the sexual objectification of women, which refers to the treatment of women as objects “existing for the use and pleasure of others” and the tying of women’s value to sexual utility (Hildebrand and Najdowski 2015, 1065). Rising Internet searches of rape-oriented pornography reveal that users actively seek material that features women in rape situations, and this material can be easily accessed through search engines like Google or on pornographic websites (Makin and Morczek, 2015).

Male victims of sexual assault are also subjected to elements of rape culture. Many rape myths have homophobic roots and rely on the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Chapleau et. al's research also cites common elements of male rape myths: male-on-male victims "must be gay," men cannot be raped, men are less affected by rape than women, men can always defend themselves in instances of rape, and more (2008, 603). In Chapleau et. al's study, men were most accepting of the rape myth that "male victims were responsible for being raped" (2008, 611). Furthermore, men tend to be more accepting of rape myths against victims of both genders than women are, in general (2008, 611). Not only does gender play an impact in the perpetuation of rape culture, but so does social environment.

In particular, college campus culture has become known for harboring and encouraging pervasive elements of rape culture. Jozkowski and Wiersma-Mosley find that underlying male dominance and fraternity party culture perpetuates a system that is supportive of rape and negative attitudes towards women as an outlet for anxiety and stress (2017). Furthermore, the use of "slut-shaming," or personally targeting certain women based on their perceived sexual promiscuity, has been used by both men and women on school campuses (Gruber, 2016, 1046). For example, women of a higher social status may shame lower status women to "cement these women's low status, regardless of sexual behavior (Armstrong et al, 2014). Women with a high social status and a femininity that is valued and men with hegemonic masculinity are more likely to invest in slut shaming and enjoy "sexual privilege" as a result (Armstrong et al, 2014, 188). This practice may discourage some victims from reporting their assault and, if applied to men as well, may also lead to the targeted branding of poor, minority men as rapists (Armstrong et al, 2014). In this paper, I argue that rape culture flourishes in environments that lack a culture that is "female-friendly."

Female-Friendly Environment

Female-friendly environment refers to environments that emphasize, whether implicitly or explicitly, behaviors of male dominance and superiority, and female inferiority. In a female-friendly environment, women feel supported, valued, and free from patterns of gender-based violence. In terms of politics, female-friendly environments exist when women feel empowered to run for elected office and make effective change in an environment that is free of discrimination. Furthermore, policies and laws in these environments tend to support women's well-being and equality within society. Examples of these include anti-discrimination laws, family leave policies, and laws that protect the reproductive rights of women.

The variable of female-friendly environment has been operationalized in a number of ways in several recent studies. Palmer and Simon created a "women-friendliness" index, which combined twelve variables like "liberalism" and "workforce composition" to predict the election of women to the U.S. House (2008). This index was later used in a study that measured the index's ability to predict "whether a female candidate sought office and won election in a legislative district in a given year" (Pyeatt and Yanus, 2016, 1112). Districts with more women-friendly environments are more likely to see female candidates and representatives (Pyeatt and Yanus, 2016).

It's also important to analyze the characterization of political offices and legislatures at a more in-depth level when determining whether a female-friendly environment exists. Studies have shown that the electoral system and the legislature are inherently gendered institutions that "marginalize" women (Schwindt-Bayer and Squire, 2014, 622). Some legislatures may marginalize women more than others, however. Powerful legislatures, which include those with competitive elections that require candidates to expend greater resources and maintain more

experience and political connections than opponents, may negatively affect women's representation (Schwindt-Bayer and Squire, 2014, 628). This study found that legislatures with higher levels of personal professional power, which encourages legislators to pursue policies to seek reelection or the establishment of a political career, are less female-friendly (Schwindt-Bayer and Squire, 2014). These legislatures incentivize incumbents to pursue behaviors and campaigns that guard political resources and possibly "open the door" to discrimination against women and other minority groups (Schwindt-Bayer and Squire, 2014, 647). Because of this, these legislatures will feature lower levels of women's representation (Schwindt-Bayer and Squire, 2014). There are a variety of social and political factors that affect the representation of women in state legislatures.

Female-friendly environment in the field of politics has also been measured with the combination of two concepts: women's political representation and levels of female-friendly policy (Caiazza, 2004, 38). Caiazza's study measures women's representation at the three levels of state legislators, executive office holders, and governors (2004, 39). Female-friendly policy is measured using the Institute for Women's Policy Research's checklist of state policies, such as policies on protection from violence, access to income support and welfare, and reproductive rights (2004, 39). These two concepts are connected and Caiazza found that higher women's representation "encourages states to pursue policies that are relevant and beneficial to women's lives" (2004, 59). Furthermore, women's representation in the legislature has a more powerful impact on policy than women's representation in executive offices (Caiazza, 2004).

Female-friendly environment also exists at a macro-level within society. The degree to which an environment is hostile towards women impacts the sociopolitical status and power of women within that environment. As a group, women gain sociopolitical power with increases in

political representation, female-owned businesses, representation in law enforcement, etc. (Johnson 2014, 1116). Johnson found that, in the case of sexual assault, as women's sociopolitical power increases, rape rates actually increased and rape clearance/arrest rates decreased (2014, 1123). These surprising results may point to a curvilinear relationship between female sociopolitical power and rape, as men may use "formal and informal social methods of control" like rape to counter the threat of more women in power (Johnson 2014, 1123). While this study is limited in that it only focuses on one state, Johnson suggests that women simply haven't reached the level of sociopolitical power to make any significant influence on the justice system or community norms (2014, 1123). In other words, Johnson states that there are not enough women in leadership positions to counter issues within the justice system yet, despite slight gains in women's political representation over the years. However, previous studies yielded inconsistent results: some have found that increased female sociopolitical power decreases rape (Baron and Straus 1987;1989), while others have found that it increases rape (Austin and Kim 2000). This disagreement may be due to small increases in women's sociopolitical power in the decade between the studies; the "year of the woman" and subsequent increase in women's leadership fell in between these dates of research.

Contributing Factors to Female-Friendly Environment

Political ideology may contribute to female-friendly environment. In the terms of this study, female-friendly environment ties directly to rape culture; the two often go hand in hand. A 2000 study by Lambert and Raichle found that participants who defined themselves as high in conservatism blamed the victim (of sexual assault) more than those who ranked high in liberalism did, an effect that was even stronger than the variable of participants' gender (858). However, women tend to blame the victim less than men do, even when controlling for political

ideology (Lambert and Raichle, 2000, 858). Additionally, political ideology may influence the seriousness with which someone views the issue of sexual assault. Kahlor and Morrison found that the more conservative individuals were, the less likely they were to view the issue of sexual assault as a “relevant topic” (2007, 735).

Beliefs about women and gender roles may also contribute to rape culture, as women make up the overwhelming majority of rape victims. A study by Talbot, Neill, and Rankin compared scores on the College Date Rape Survey (CDRAS) and the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS) and found that respondents “who were more egalitarian or liberal in their gender role beliefs” were “less accepting of rape myths and had attitudes that were less accepting of rape”, while those who had more traditional or conservative beliefs about women had the opposite response (2010, 176). Another study found that women who had more conservative attitudes about women and gender roles “attributed less fault and responsibility to perpetrators”, especially when the hypothetical victim did not resist when being assaulted (Ong and Ward, 1999, 371). As rape is a crime of control and domination instead of sexual gratification (Johnson, 2014, 1112) cultures that encourage social domination of women may see more pervasive forms of rape culture.

How Female-Friendly Environment Affects Reporting

Victims of sexual assault face many external and internal barriers that affect their decision to report their crime to law enforcement and take the first steps towards justice. Some of these barriers, like threats of violence by the perpetrator or discouragement from family and friends who may believe the victim wasn’t actually assaulted or who want to avoid public shame and embarrassment are more prevalent in environments which are hostile towards women. The victim may also internalize elements of the hostile environment they find themselves in and feel

hesitant to step forward, ashamed, and unsure if their experience would actually be classified as “rape” and worth the attention of law enforcement. A study by Ahren found five reasons for victim’s nondisclosure: lack of options, fear of negative reactions or consequences, ineffectiveness of support, self-blame or embarrassment, and not knowing if their experience qualifies as rape (2006, 270). Non-reporting results in the silencing of rape victims, which further adds to the powerlessness and subordinated status of women. This continues the hostile environment, creating a vicious cycle. Victims are more likely to report their rape if the circumstances correspond with the “real rape” or “classic rape situation” of violent, stranger rape in which the victim resisted physically (Williams 1984). If a victim did not experience brutal force, was not “threatened with a weapon, or was not seriously injured”, he or she will be less likely to report (Williams 1984, 464). The rape myth of the classic rape situation contributes to victims’ willingness to identify themselves as victims of crime and report their victimization to authorities. These rape myths are more prevalent in environments that lack female-friendly culture.

How Female-Friendly Environment Affects Responses to Victimization

When a female victim does decide to report their sexual assault to law enforcement or receive an evidence-collecting exam (which can be done in some states without reporting to police), they may encounter the effects of a hostile environment towards women. First, they encounter response by law enforcement in the form of police officers and detectives and by medical professionals who perform the exam. Police officers may subscribe to elements of rape culture and view sex crimes that do not fit stereotypical beliefs about rape with skepticism and reluctance to move forward with the justice process. This attitude may permeate entire police departments if not addressed. Feild’s survey, which included police officers and rape crisis

counselors, found that participants endorsed fourteen out of thirty-two rape myths (1978). Possible factors that contribute to officers' skepticism of victims include the sobriety/intoxication of the victim, if the victim delays reporting their assault, previous consensual sex with the perpetrator, previous complaints of rape, psychiatric or mental health issues, and perceived immorality of the victim (Jordan 2004). Police "who suspect victims of lying may use tactics such as a threatening and intimidation" (Corrigan 2013, 933). They may also refuse to take victims in for SANE exams (forensic evidence-gathering exams), deny them exams, and conduct drug and alcohol testing on victims without their consent (Corrigan 2013). Rape myths that perpetrate the medical community may cause SANE nurses ("*Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners*") to view compliance with the medical exam as "their own assessment of a victim's credibility" (Corrigan 2013, 939). The rape exam can be one of the most invasive steps in the justice process, as it requires the careful collection of forensic evidence from exterior and interior parts of the body. Victims can refuse this exam for personal reasons. It's important to note that the rape exam also involves gathering significant details about the victim's sexual life, like number of sexual partners, contraceptive use, and history of sexually transmitted infections, all which may affect a victim's credibility (Corrigan 2013, 941). Bias and subscription to rape culture by first responders can negatively impact evidence collection and the victim, sometimes to the point of encouraging the victim to drop out of the justice process.

A victim's informal support system consists of those closest to them, such as family and friends. Depending on these individuals' personal subscriptions to rape culture and rape myths, they can shape an environment that is hostile for the victim. They can negatively affect the victim's emotional healing and willingness to report and continue the justice process. These support networks support victims whose experience fits the stereotypical definition of "real rape"

more than victims whose experiences do not (Steketee and Austin 1989, 291). Anderson and Lyons found that responses from first responders influence subsequent support provided to victims, like family members (2005). Also, victims who are better socially supported may be blamed less than victims who were not; this reveals the double disadvantage of not being supported and therefore having blame directed at a victim who do not receive support (Anderson and Lyons 2005). Informal support systems may also use inappropriate support attempts that unintentionally harm the victim, like comments or suggestions that lead to self-blame (Ahrens 2006, 271).

After an assault has been reported and given a case number by police, the legal process begins. Prosecutors may be more likely to view a criminal case as “winnable” if it fits the stereotypes of “real rape” like the use of a weapon and violence (Hildebrand and Najdowski 2015, 1061). Defense attorneys may use certain strategies that play into rape myths, like “maintaining that the woman consented to sex” and questioning a victim’s credibility (Steketee and Austin 1989, 298). Juries may also be influenced by rape culture and make decisions that stem from their subscription to these beliefs. Research by Hildebrand and Najdowski found evidence that the more jurors endorse rape myths, the more likely they are to blame the victim, deny experiences that fail to fit the stereotype of “real rape”, and “acquit the accused perpetrator” (2015, 1078). Furthermore, certain aspects like victim clothing and whether or not the victim had been drinking had a larger impact when juries endorsed rape myths (2015, 1079). Gray found that rape myths influence jury decision making in ambiguous “date rape” situations, an effect that is more strongly seen in male jurors (2006).

Female-friendly culture also affects victims’ emotions and actions in court. A 1999 study by Konradi revealed that victims experience certain incentives to produce emotional demeanors

that met cultural stereotypes of rape, like showing “fear and embarrassment” and being “subject to emotional breakdown” (56). Victims are aware of the prevalence of stereotypes and what a “false rape victim” looks like (unemotional, hard) and go out of their way to avoid being cast as such (Konradi 1999, 56). This suppressing of emotion “meets the needs of prosecutors and judges” and gains success for the prosecution of the case (Konradi, 1999, 69). Through rape culture, a hostile environment is created for female victims of sexual assault throughout the entire justice process.

Theory

This paper analyzes the connections between three main variables of interest: political conservatism, female-friendly environment, and arrests for the crime of rape. First, I explore how political conservatism varies at the state level. This independent variable is operationalized with the majority party of the state legislature and how each state voted in presidential elections. I then analyze how political conservatism affects female-friendly environment at the state level. This intervening variable of female-friendly environment is further broken down into three categories: women's political representation, female-friendly political environment, and female-friendly policy. I argue that states with higher levels of political conservatism will have environments that are less female-friendly. Governmental officials, as well as the population of the state, may have beliefs that misalign with the ideals of gender equality, female empowerment, and reproductive autonomy for women.

I then explore the connections of both political conservatism and female-friendly environment to the dependent variable of arrests for rape. This variable measures the number of alleged offenders apprehended and arrested by law enforcement. I argue that states with higher levels of political conservatism will have higher numbers of arrests for rape. I believe this is due to the "law and order" and "tough on crime" perspectives that conservatives and Republicans tend to hold on crime. Even if law enforcement does subscribe to rape culture, they will tend to be harsher on crime and more apt to make arrests than states that are more liberal or Democratic.

This argument leads to my **three central hypotheses** of this analysis. First, states that lean towards political conservatism will have environments that are less female-friendly. Second, states with environments that are less female-friendly will have lower arrest rates than states with

environments that are more female-friendly. Lastly, states that lean towards political conservatism will have higher numbers of arrests for rape.

Research Design

To access my argument, I use a large-N quantitative analysis with a time frame of 2008-2016. This framing allows for the tracing of changes in my variables over a period of time. I use states as my unit of analysis. I collect data from all fifty states within the United States of America. As my independent variable of political conservatism and my intervening variable of female-friendly culture vary across the United States, collecting data at the state level allows for the identification of regional and local patterns and connections that occur.

My dependent variable is arrest numbers. I measure number of arrests with the number of alleged offenders arrested for the crime of attempted/completed rape within a state. For this variable, I use annual Uniform Crime Reports (UCR's) compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Prior to 2013, this data included crimes measured under the FBI's "legacy definition" of rape: the carnal knowledge of a female with force and without consent. After 2013, the FBI UCR program revised this definition to fit a more inclusive view of the crime of rape. Data collected for the year 2013 defines rape as penetration without consent of the victim, includes attempts, and does not specify gender as the legacy definition does. Therefore, male victims are now included under this definition. Arrests for rape did increase after this definition change, as a greater number of offenses could be classified as rape and as a greater number of victims could be formally and legally classified as such.

The independent variable of political conservatism is operationalized two ways. First, I measure the majority party of the state legislature: Republican, Democrat, or mixed, if each chamber has a different majority party. This data comes from the National Conference of State Legislatures' annual records of state partisan composition. Second, I analyze how each state voted in the three presidential elections of 2008, 2012, and 2016. I use Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S.

Presidential Elections for this data. Leip measures this data with the percentage of the popular vote won by each presidential candidate, but I only focus on the major two party candidates for the Democratic and Republican parties. I then transcribe these percentages into dichotomous variables according to the candidate who won the majority of the popular vote for each state. Obviously, there are only three years of data for presidential elections within my time frame of study: 2008, 2012, and 2016. In my data set, I use the popular vote counts for the 2008 election for the years of 2009, 2010, and 2011. I do the same for the 2012 election and use those vote counts for the years 2013, 2014, and 2015. States with a majority Republican legislature and in which the Republican candidate won the majority of the popular vote in presidential elections are characterized as having greater political conservatism.

The intervening variable of female-friendly environment is further divided into three categories, with two indicators for each category. First, I analyze women's political representation. For this category, I use the percentage of state legislatures made up of women elected to the legislature and the number of women serving at the state executive level. This number can range from zero to three, dependent on whether or not women hold the office of governor, lieutenant governor, and/or attorney general for each state. The data for these two indicators comes from Rutgers' Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP).

Second, I analyze female-friendly political environment. For this category, I begin with the prevalence of abortion providers within each state. I use annual "Who Decides? The Status of Women's Reproductive Rights in the United States" reports by the NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation. These reports measure the percentage of counties within a state that have no abortion provider or abortion clinic, which is an outcome of policy and attitudes of state officials on abortion. My second indicator for this category measures whether or not a legislature is "pro-

choice” in regards to abortion. This data also comes from the NARAL annual reports mentioned above. State legislatures were counted as “not” pro-choice, mixed, or pro-choice.

Lastly, I analyze female-friendly policy. For this category, I begin with welfare policy. Specifically, I analyze whether or not states extend welfare eligibility and TANF benefits to pregnant women with no other children. This is coded as a dummy variable; either states grant this eligibility or they don't. Second, I analyze abortion policy. I use the framework employed by Caiazza in her 2004 study, which implemented the Institute for Women's Policy Research's checklist of female-friendly state policies. For this study, I measure policies on women's reproductive rights with the Guttmacher Institute's data on states “hostile” to abortion rights. This is a dummy variable; states are either not hostile or considered to be hostile or “extremely” hostile towards abortion rights.

Finally, I control for extraneous variables that may have an impact on my variables of interest. First, I control for population size of each state using data from U.S. Census ACS 1-year estimates. Second, I control for how urban each state is. I use the previously mentioned Census data as a source for this control factor as well. This measures the distribution of each state's population with the percentage of the population that lives in rural areas and in urban areas.

For my analysis, I employ a time series cross-sectional (TSC) multivariate regression, which allows for comparison between each case and over a period of time. With a multivariate regression, I analyze the relationships between multiple variables.

I use the program STATA to analyze my data using a combination of linear regressions, logistic regressions, and ordered probit regressions. I test three pathways in order to quantify the relationships between my variables. First, I test Pathway A: the relationship between political conservatism and female-friendly environment. Second, I test Pathway B: the relationship

between female-friendly environment and arrest numbers. Lastly, I test Pathway C: the relationship between political conservatism and arrest numbers. I then run a Sobel Test in order to determine which variables are significant, intervening mediators between political conservatism and arrest numbers.

This study allows for an in-depth analysis of the connections between political conservatism, female-friendly environment, and arrests for the crime of sexual assault. I conclude with policy recommendations that may be employed at the local, state, and national levels.

Analysis

Using the research methods described in the previous section, I analyze three hypotheses of interest: (1) states that lean towards political conservatism will have environments that are less female-friendly; (2) states with environments that are less female-friendly will have lower arrest numbers than states with environments that are more female-friendly; and (3) states that lean towards political conservatism will have higher arrest numbers for rape. I test the relationships between political conservatism (independent variable), female-friendly environment (intervening variable), and arrest numbers for rape (dependent variable) using a combination of linear regressions, logistic regressions, and ordered probit regressions. I also include two control variables for each pathway: percentage of a state's population that resides in urban areas and overall population size for the state. I break the results of each relationship into three pathways- A, B, and C- along with the corresponding data tables below.

Political Conservatism and Female-Friendly Environment (Pathway A)

I break the intervening variable of female-friendly environment into three categories: women's political representation, female-friendly political environment, and female-friendly policy. Each category contains two indicators/variables each

I. Women's Political Representation

The first variable under the category of women's political representation is percentage of women in state legislature. Overall, the relationship between political conservatism, which is operationalized by the variables of partisan control of the legislature and the party of the presidential candidate winning the majority of a state's popular vote, and percentage of women in a state's legislature, is consistently negative and statistically significant, while controlling for how urban the state is and the size of the state's population (see Table 1). In this linear

regression, the R-squared is .4465, which means that 44.65% of the variation in women's political representation is explained by political conservatism. The percentage of women in a state's legislature decreases by 12.72% if the legislature is Democratic or mixed and the presidential popular vote winner is Republican. This percentage shifts to a 5.79% decrease if the legislature is Republican and the presidential popular vote winner is a Democrat. The combination with the highest political conservatism- a Republican legislature and a Republican presidential popular vote winner- shows a 9.33% decrease in percentage of women in a state's legislature. Population size was a significant control variable, but a weak coefficient. The percentage of population living in urban areas fails to reach statistical significance.

Table 1: Political Conservatism and Percentage of Women in State Legislature

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-.1272	(.0116) ***
Republican Leg, Democratic Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-.0579	(.0080) ***
Republican Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-.0933	(.0076) ***
Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	.0063	(.0284)
Population Size	-.0001	(.0000) **
Constant	.2964	(.0238) ***

* p=.05 ** p=.01 ***p=.001

R-squared= .4465

The second variable measuring women's political representation, the number of women in state executive office, ranges from 0 to 3. If a state had a female governor, lieutenant governor, and attorney general, it was classified as a 3. If a state had zero women in executive office, it was classified as a 0. In this ordered probit regression, two of the political conditions were statistically significant and also negative (Table 2). The R-squared is .1445, meaning that 14.45% of the variation in women in state executive office is explained by political conservatism. The number of women in a state's executive office decreases by 1.496 if the legislature is Democratic or mixed and the presidential popular vote winner is Republican. If the legislature is Republican and the presidential popular vote winner is a Democrat, the number of women increases by .1961, although this is not significant. The combination with the highest political conservatism- a Republican legislature and a Republican presidential popular vote winner- shows a .7690 decrease in the number of women in a state's executive office. This is the most statistically significant measure, as well. The percentage of a state's population residing in urban areas was a significant control variable with a positive coefficient. With each percentage increase in urban area population, the number of women in executive office increases by 2.182.

Table 2: Political Conservatism and Women in State Executive Offices

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-1.496	(.5011) **
Republican Leg, Democratic Presidential Popular Vote Winner	.1961	(.1967)
Republican Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-.7690	(.1454) ***
Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	2.182	(.4830) ***
Population Size	-.0006	(.0008)
Cut 1	1.351	(.3908)
Cut 2	3.026	(.4222)

* p=.05 ** p=.01 ***p=.001

Pseudo-R-squared= .1445

II. Female-Friendly Political Environment

The first variable under female-friendly political environment is the percentage of counties with abortion providers/clinics. In other words, I predict the presence of abortion providers based on the partisanship of the state legislature and how the state population voted in presidential elections. For this linear regression (Table 3), the R-squared value is .5099, which means that 50.99% of the variation is explained by political conservatism. The percentage of a state's counties with abortion providers decreases by 31.79% if the legislature is Democratic or mixed and the presidential popular vote winner is Republican. This percentage shifts to a .23.8% decrease if the legislature is Republican and the presidential popular vote winner is a Democrat. Lastly, if a state has a Republican legislature and a Republican presidential popular vote winner, the percentage of that state's counties with abortion providers falls by 33.09%. All three combinations are statically significant. Both control variables were also significant, although percentage of population residing in urban areas had a higher coefficient.

Table 3: Political Conservatism and Percentage of Counties With Abortion Providers

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-0.3179	(.0263) ***
Republican Leg, Democratic Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-.2380	(.0283) ***
Republican Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-.3309	(.0224) ***
Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	.2358	(.0844) **
Population Size	.0003	(.0001) *
Constant	.2193	(.0634) ***

* p=.05 ** p=.01 ***p=.001

R-squared= .5099

The second variable under female-friendly political environment is whether or not a state's legislature is classified as "pro-choice" in regards to abortion. The importance of this component of female-friendly political environment is tested by examining the role political conservatism has upon predicting whether a state legislature is classified as pro-choice. In this ordered probit regression, the pseudo R-squared is .4088; 40.88% of the variation is explained by political conservatism. The likeliness that a state's legislature is pro-choice decreases by 2.958 if the legislature is Democratic or mixed and the presidential popular vote winner is Republican. This number shifts to a 2.636 decrease if the legislature is Republican and the presidential popular vote winner is a Democrat. Lastly, if a state has a Republican legislature and a Republican presidential popular vote winner, the likeliness of that state's legislature being classified as pro-choice falls by 3.387. All three are statistically significant. Furthermore, with each percentage shift of a state's population residing in urban areas, the likeliness that its legislature is pro-choice decreases by 1.368.

Table 4: Political Conservatism and Pro-Choice Legislature

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-2.958	(.3862) ***
Republican Leg, Democratic Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-2.636	(.3047) ***
Republican Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-3.387	(.2930) ***
Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	-1.368	(.5212) **
Population Size	.0017	(.0010)
Cut 1	-3.396	(.4943)
Cut 2	-1.078	(.4098)

* p=.05 ** p=.01 ***p=.001

Pseudo R-squared= .4088

III. Female-Friendly Policy

The first variable under female-friendly policy is whether or not a state extends welfare eligibility and TANF benefits to pregnant women with no children. In this logistic regression, the pseudo R-squared is .2374, which means that 23.74% of the variation is explained by political conservatism (Table 5). The likeliness that a state extends pregnant welfare eligibility decreases by 2.950 if the legislature is Democratic or mixed and the presidential popular vote winner is Republican. This is statistically significant. This number shifts to a .1501 decrease if the legislature is Republican and the presidential popular vote winner is a Democrat. Lastly, if a state has a Republican legislature and a Republican presidential popular vote winner, the likeliness that a state extends pregnant welfare eligibility falls by 1.961. This measure is also statistically significant. Both control variables were significant, but percentage of the state's population residing in urban areas had a much larger and positive coefficient. For each percentage increase in urban dwellers, the likeliness that the state extends this eligibility increases by 4.896.

Table 5: Political Conservatism and Pregnant Welfare Eligibility

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-2.950	(.6525) ***
Republican Leg, Democratic Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-.1501	(.4899)
Republican Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-1.961	(.3282) ***
Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	4.896	(1.062) ***
Population Size	-.0083	(.0017) ***
Constant	-1.321	(.7418)

* p=.05 ** p=.01 ***p=.001

Pseudo R-squared= .2374

The second variable under female-friendly policy is the hostility of a state's policy towards abortion rights (Table 6). This is a dummy variable and states were coded as either not hostile (1) or hostile/extremely hostile (0). The pseudo R-squared is .4609, which means that 46.09% of the variation is explained by political conservatism. In order to properly and coherently explain these results, I reverse the direction of the coefficient. The hostility of a state's policy towards abortion rights increases by 5.427 if the legislature is Democratic or mixed and the presidential popular vote winner is Republican. This number shifts to a 4.262 increase if the legislature is Republican and the presidential popular vote winner is a Democrat. Lastly, if a state has a Republican legislature and a Republican presidential popular vote winner, the hostility of a state's policy towards abortion rights increases by 5.217. This measure is also statistically significant. Urban population percentage was a significant and strong control variable. For each percentage shift in population residing in urban areas, the hostility of abortion policy increases by 5.165.

Table 6: Political Conservatism and Hostility of Policy Towards Abortion Rights

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-5.427	(.7762) ***
Republican Leg, Democratic Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-4.262	(.5672) ***
Republican Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	-5.217	(.5355) ***
Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	-5.165	(2.002) **
Population Size	-.0002	(.0028)
Constant	7.178	(1.612) ***

* p=.05 ** p=.01 ***p=.001

Pseudo R-squared= .4609

Female-Friendly Environment and Arrests for Rape (Pathway B)

In testing the relationship between the intervening variable, female-friendly environment, and the dependent variable, arrests for rape, I find nuanced results (Table 7). Some elements of female-friendly environment led to more arrests, while others led to less. Furthermore, three out of the six intervening variable indicators are significant. The coefficients range in direction and in strength. I use a linear regression to test this relationship.

First, while not statistically significant, as the percentage of women in a state's legislature rises by 1%, the number of arrests for rape rises by 230.3. As mentioned earlier in the paper, there is disagreement in the literature regarding this dynamic; hence my findings are suggestive that additional research is needed in this debated area. Second, as the number of women in state executive offices rises by one woman, arrests rises by 27.90. However, this is also not significant. Another suggestive, though not statistically significant finding is that as a state legislature moves from "not pro-choice" to "pro-choice," the number of arrests increases by 1.512. One important and statistically significant finding is that as the percentage of counties with abortion providers increases by 1%, the number of arrests decreases by 136.5. Additionally, as a state moves from not extending welfare eligibility and TANF benefits to pregnant women with no other children to extending that eligibility, arrests increase by 80.73. This measure is the most has the highest level of statistical significance out of all six indicators with a large coefficient. Lastly, as a state's policy on abortion moves from non-hostile to hostile, arrests decrease by 77.28 (another statistically significant variable).

The R-squared for this table is .8234, which means that female-friendly environment accounts for 82.34% of the variation in arrests for rape. Population size was a significant control variable with a relatively small coefficient.

Table 7: Female-Friendly Environment and Arrests for Rape

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Percentage of Women in State Legislature	230.3	(164.5)
Women in State Executive Offices	27.90	(18.97)
Percentage of Counties with Abortion Providers	-136.5	(60.38) *
Pro-Choice Legislature	1.512	(20.70)
Pregnant Welfare Eligibility	80.73	(20.30) ***
Hostility of Policy Towards Abortion	-77.28	(29.68) **
Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	-68.80	(52.94)
Population Size	6.534	(.2847) ***
Constant	-16.85	(41.56)

* p=.05 ** p=.01 ***p=.001

R-squared= .8234

Political Conservatism and Arrests for Rape (Pathway C)

The last pathway tests the relationship between the independent variable, political conservatism, and the dependent variable, arrests for rape, using a linear regression (see Table 8). Two out of the three measures were statistically significant. The R-squared value is .8448, which means that 84.48% of the variation in arrests for rape is explained by political conservatism.

Arrests for rape increases by 39.03 if the legislature is Democratic or mixed and the presidential popular vote winner is Republican. This number shifts to a 224.1 increase in arrests if the legislature is Republican and the presidential popular vote winner is a Democrat. Lastly, if a state has a Republican legislature and a Republican presidential popular vote winner, number of arrests for rape increases by 58.13. It's important to note that the largest coefficient is not with the most politically conservative condition; instead, it is with the condition of a Republican majority legislature and a Democratic presidential popular vote winner. This combination also has the highest level of statistical significance. Furthermore, population size was a significant control variable, while percent urban failed to reach statistical significance.

Table 8: Political Conservatism and Arrests for Rape

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	39.03	(22.71)
Republican Leg, Democratic Presidential Popular Vote Winner	224.1	(47.27) ***
Republican Leg, Republican Presidential Popular Vote Winner	58.13	(21.68) **
Percentage of Population in Urban Areas	26.40	(53.46)
Population Size	6.408	(.2866) ***
Constant	-74.51	(44.96)

* p=.05 ** p=.01 ***p=.001

Pseudo R-squared= .8448

Sobel Test

After testing the three pathways, I conduct a Sobel Test in order to evaluate which intervening variables under female-friendly environment are significant mediators. As shown in the testing of pathway C, states that tend to lean towards political conservatism also tend to have higher arrest numbers for rape. Mediators explain the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables: in this case, between political conservatism and arrests for rape. Three out of the six intervening variables are significant mediators between political conservatism and arrests for rape: percentage of counties with abortion providers, pregnant welfare eligibility, and hostility of policy towards abortion.

First, the percentage of counties with abortion providers is a significant mediator of the impact of political conservatism on arrests for rape, with a p value of .02. In other words, an increase in abortion providers leads to a decrease in arrest numbers for rape. Second, whether or not a state extends welfare eligibility and TANF benefits to pregnant women with no other children is a significant mediator, with a p value of .001. States that extend these benefits have lower arrest numbers. Third, hostility of state policy towards abortion rights is a significant mediator, with a p value of .01. States with more favorable policy towards abortion rights tend to have lower arrest numbers.

The other three intervening variables, percentage of women in state legislature, number of women in executive offices, and pro-choice legislature, were not significant mediators. This means that they do not impact the relationship between the independent and dependent variable.

Discussion

The results of this study are very nuanced and require greater understanding of conservative ideology, crime, and attitudes towards women and abortion.

First, this study shows the true impact and prevalence of the “tough on crime” and “law and order” perspectives that conservatives/Republicans may hold towards crime. On average, the more politically conservative a state is, the more arrests are made for the crime of rape. States that are more liberal or vote Democrat tend to make fewer arrests for the crime of rape, on average. I attribute this to both the attitudes and policy implementation that conservatives hold towards crime. Arrest numbers are a very general measure of this, but it does reflect actions made by law enforcement. While I do not compare arrests for rape with arrests made for any other type of crime, this study reveals that politically conservative states, on average, tend to arrest more offenders for the crime of rape. This may come from the legislative level; conservative states may have more stringent and encompassing laws on the books for sexual assault, and harsher punishments for offenders. It may also come from the law enforcement agency level. Agencies in more conservative states may be encouraged to make more arrests or direct greater attention towards sex crimes. This requires a more in-depth, case study analysis in order to examine and understand why arrests for rape tend to be higher in conservative states. Future studies should analyze this issue at a deeper level and study the impact and relationships between various indicators of the prevalence of sexual assault in a state, like reporting rates, arrest numbers, and convictions.

Second, female-friendly policies tend to be more significant mediators between political conservatism and arrests for rape than other measures of female-friendly environment. Women’s political representation at both the legislative and executive state levels was not a significant

mediator of the impact of political conservatism on arrests for rape. In other words, having more women in office does not affect this relationship. Only one of the indicators under the category of female-friendly environment, percentage of counties with abortion providers, is a significant mediator. An increase in abortion providers had a negative impact on arrest numbers. Whether or not a state legislature is “pro-choice” was not a significant mediator. Lastly, both variables under the category of female-friendly policy were significant mediators. Extending welfare eligibility and TANF benefits to pregnant women with no other children and enacting policies that are more favorable towards abortion rights tends to lead to an increase in arrest numbers for rape. Female-friendly policy seems to have more of an impact on the relationship between political conservatism and arrests for rape than women’s political representation and female-friendly environment. Furthermore, attitudes and policies towards abortion rights play the biggest mediating role.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that the connection between women’s reproductive health and freedom, more specifically in terms of abortion, and sexual assault mitigates the relationship between conservatism and the “tough on crime” perspective. In other words, while politically conservative states tend to make more arrests for the crime of rape, this arrest number drops when the following occur: (1) when the percentage of counties with abortion providers increases; (2) when a state grants welfare eligibility/TANF benefits to pregnant women with no other children; and/or (3) when a state’s policy is more hostile towards abortion. Two out of the three of these indicators relate to women’s healthcare and reproductive rights, both at the environmental level and the policy level. Politically conservative states tend to have a more proactive and successful approach towards arresting alleged sexual offenders, but women’s reproductive freedom and rights to abortion complicates this relationship.

Conclusion

This study reveals the complicated state of affairs our country faces when it comes to sexual assault, partisanship, crime, female-friendly attitudes and policies, and abortion rights. The story is quite nuanced, and the connection between sexual assault and “women’s issues,” like abortion policy, welfare, and the political representation of women may negatively impact our justice system and its effectiveness to adequately deal with sex offenders.

As America opens its eyes to the crime of sexual assault and seeks solutions to improve the functioning of our justice system, we must take into account factors serving as barriers towards justice for victims of sexual assault. Beliefs and attitudes held by those who identify as conservative and/or Republican, particularly those that create environments and policies that devalue and disempower women, are one significant barrier uncovered in this study. I found that anti-welfare policy and anti-abortion policy play a major role in negating the positive effects of political conservatism on arrests for rape. There may be other attitudes and policies that also explicitly or implicitly disempower the decision making power of women and the support they receive by society, which should be explored in future studies.

Overall, if we wish to tackle the monster of sexual assault, we must first further explore the societal attitudes and policies that weaken our ability to fight this issue. We must work to create positive environments for women, in which women feel supported, valued, and free from gender-based discrimination and violence. In doing so, male victims of this crime will also feel validated and supported to pursue justice and healing after their victimizations. Unfortunately, there is great disparity in these positive, victim-friendly and female-friendly environments across the country. Some states have very positive and female-friendly environments, with higher numbers of women in legislative and executive office, policies that allow for women to make

their own decisions when it comes to reproductive choices, and greater support for women struggling with poverty. Other states lacked in these areas, and this study reveals that these states tend to lean conservative and/or Republican. I believe that the Republican Party at both the national and state levels would find great societal and electoral benefit in exploring policies that are more favorable to women. The “tough on crime” stance, which tends to be adopted by this party, is a positive thing when it comes to arrests for rape. However, arresting offenders is only one part of the solution. We need to create a society that values the equality, safety, and capability of women in order to fully combat the issue of sexual assault. It is clear that the existing disparities in attitudes towards and support for women, coupled with an environment that does not grant the gravity needed towards the issue of sexual assault, only creates more victims and allows offenders to walk free. This is an issue that can affect anyone- a daughter, a friend, a brother- and we owe it to the survivors to break down barriers that prevent us from winning the battle against sexual assault.

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