



Do Tax-Funded Campaigns Increase the Percentage of Women in State Legislatures?

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Note: The following report is an updated version of an Issue Analysis originally published by the Center for Competitive Politics in August 2008. This version has been edited to include data from three additional legislative sessions in Arizona and Maine.

Issue

Advocates of taxpayer-funded political campaigns, often called “clean elections” by their proponents, claim that these systems provide the ability for an increased number of diverse, non-traditional candidates to be elected to public office.

To this end, increases in the number of women in state legislatures are frequently touted as an example of the success of tax-financed campaign programs. Supporters have claimed that because “women have less access to money, time, and other resources to run for office...Clean Elections has opened the doors for more women to run who would not have been able to run before.”¹

¹ “Women and Clean Elections,” Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. Retrieved on June 12, 2013. Available at: https://www.maineclipselections.org/sites/default/files/fact_sheets/CE_Maine_Woman.pdf (September 2004), p. 1.

According to these proponents, replacing voluntary private contributions to candidates with taxpayer dollars will eliminate or at least diminish the alleged problem of scarcer fundraising opportunities for female candidates.

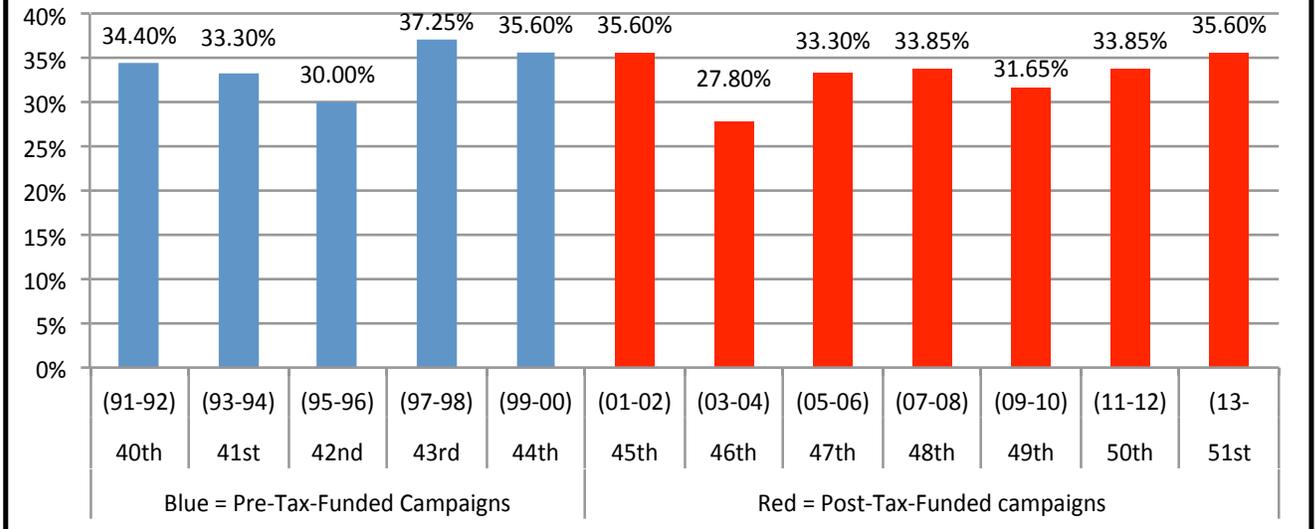
If this claim is accurate, we would expect to see a rising percentage of female legislators in Arizona and Maine, two states which have provided taxpayer funds to qualifying legislative candidates since the 2000 election cycle. The following research examines legislator gender in Arizona and Maine in order to evaluate the claim that taxpayer-funded political campaigns have actually increased the number of women able to successfully run for office.

Analysis

For decades, there has been a marked increase in the number of women winning legislative office in all 50 states. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, “since 1969, the number of women serving in legislatures has increased substantially from several hundred to 1,789 - or 24.2 percent of the



Percentage of Women in the Arizona Legislature, 1991-2013⁶



7,382 seats.”² This trend holds true for both the Republican and Democratic parties.³

The progress women have made in winning elections and obtaining leadership positions in state governments is significant. In particular, Arizona and Maine have historically been national leaders in electing women to their state Legislatures. According to the Center for American Women and Politics, Arizona has ranked among the top ten states in terms of highest percentage of women legislators for 28 of the past 30 years.⁴ Similarly, Maine has been among the top ten states for 17 of the past 30 years.⁵

² “Legislator Demographics,” National Conference of State Legislatures. Retrieved on June 13, 2013. Available at http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legismgt/about/demographic_overview.htm (2013).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ “State Fact Sheet – Arizona,” Center for American Women in Politics. Retrieved on June 13, 2013. Available at: http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/resources/state_fact_sheets/AZ.php (2013).

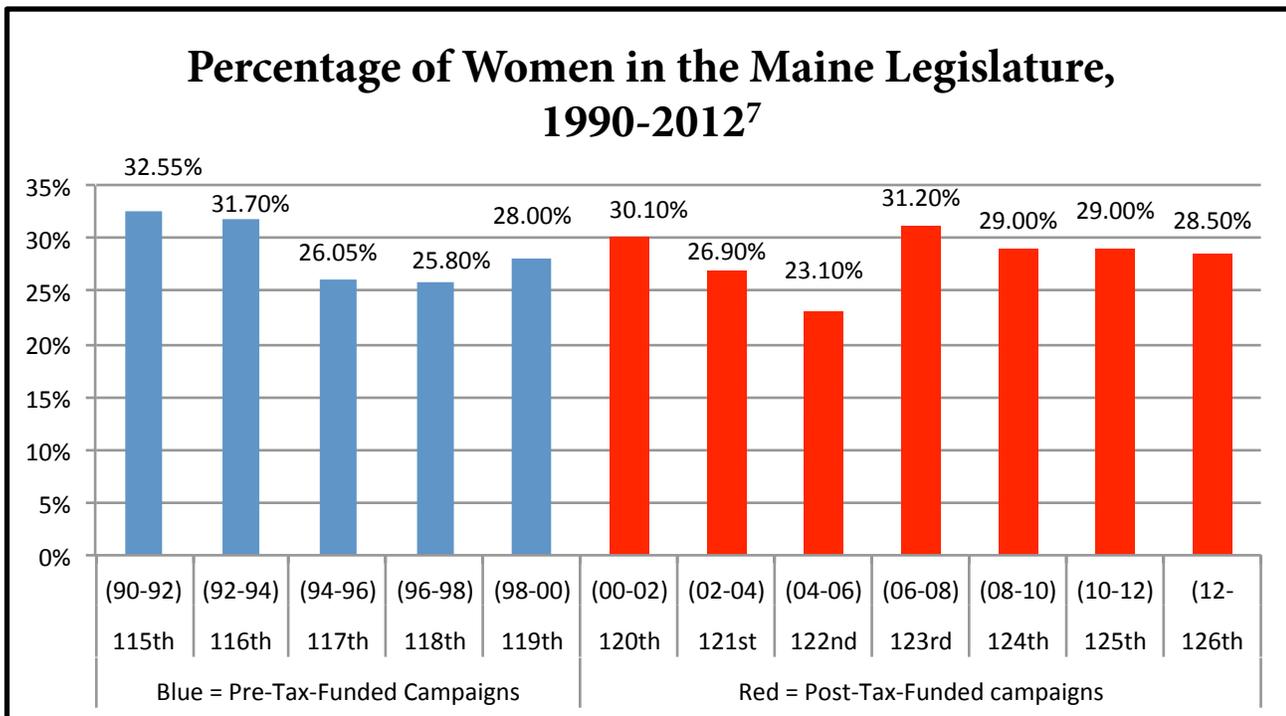
⁵ “State Fact Sheet – Maine,” Center for American Women in Politics. Retrieved on June 13, 2013. Available at http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/resources/state_fact_sheets/ME.php (2013).

However, the data from both Arizona and Maine show little change in the number of women serving in their Legislatures since each state’s adoption of taxpayer-funded political campaigns.

In Arizona, since 1991, the highest percentage of women serving in the Legislature (37.25%) actually occurred in the 1997-1998 legislative session, several years before the state’s taxpayer-funded campaign program began. By contrast, the lowest percentage of women serving in the Legislature (27.80%) occurred under taxpayer-funded campaigns in the 2003-2004 session.

In 1991, 34.40% of Arizona lawmakers were women; in 2013, women comprised 35.60% of the Legislature. Women averaged 34.11% of all Arizona legislators between 1991 and 2000 under the previous system of voluntary, private contributions, while the tax-funded system implemented beginning with the 2001-2002 legislative session has averaged 33.09%, a 1.02%

⁶ *Ibid.* 4. The data for Arizona was calculated by averaging the percentage of women in the Arizona Legislature for both years of all two-year legislative sessions, in order to accurately account for any yearly changes over a two-year session.



decrease.

Maine's experience illustrates a similar theme. In the years studied before Maine's taxpayer funded campaign program began, women constituted an average of 28.82% of Maine's Legislature. Since taxpayer-funded campaigns were implemented in 2000, women in the Legislature have declined slightly to an average of 28.26%. Currently, in the 126th Legislature, 28.50% of Maine's legislators are women.

Like Arizona, since 1990, the highest percentage of women in Maine's Legislature (32.55%) occurred under a system of voluntary campaign contributions, in 1990-1992, and the session with the lowest percentage of women (23.10%) occurred under so-called "clean elections" in 2004-2006.

⁷ *Ibid.* 5. The data for Maine was calculated by averaging the percentage of women in the Maine Legislature for both years of all two-year legislative sessions, in order to accurately account for any yearly changes over a two-year session. Maine's Legislature has different years than Arizona's because Maine's Legislatures are seated in December while Arizona's Legislatures are seated in January (i.e. Maine's 125th Legislature was officially seated in December 2010 before finally adjourning its two-year session in May 2012).

Conclusion

The average number of female legislators in Arizona and Maine declined slightly in both states after they began providing taxpayer dollars to legislative candidates. Both states also witnessed the highest number of women in their Legislatures before the inception of their tax-funded campaign programs, and the lowest number of women after.

Based on this research, advocates' claim that taxpayer-funded political campaigns increase the number of women elected to office is false. If female legislative hopefuls do in fact face challenges and barriers to fundraising that their male counterparts do not, the evidence clearly demonstrates that taxpayer-funded political campaigns should not be considered as a possible remedy to this problem.



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