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A STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF THE #METOO MOVEMENT ON STATE LEVEL
POLICY MAKING

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the effects of social movements, specifically the #MeToo Movement, on state legislation. To do so, this thesis examines the timing and processes of two cases of passed legislation in Missouri and Texas. Though the #MeToo Movement was founded in 2006, the height of the movement in 2017 provided an open policy window in which political actors and entrepreneurs were able to pursue their prepared proposals. In Missouri, the rise of #MeToo inspired political ally Senator Holly Rehder to first publish a personal essay detailing her experience with sexual assault before sponsoring and introducing Senate Bill 775. This bill provides the “Sexual Assault Survivors Bill of Rights” and includes clearly stated directions and rights to victims of sexual assault. The prompt action, collaboration, and prepared proposals that Senator Rehder pursued resulted in successful legislation. In Texas, Representative Victoria Neave sponsored and introduced House Bill 21 in the wake of #MeToo. This bill extends statute of limitations applicable to a sexual harassment complaint filed with the Texas Workforce Commission. Though this bill was successfully enacted, Neave’s crucial mistakes such as hesitation to take advantage of the open policy window, the creation of a new task force, and a previous successful legislative session, led to a less robust legislative outcome. The ability for social movements to affect political outcomes rely heavily on the timing of policy windows, the relationships between political allies and external actors, the number, type, size, and location of events, and political entrepreneurs. The comparison of the presented case studies highlight the differences in these aspects and identify how they lend themselves to differing political outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

Missouri Republican Senator Holly Rehder has sponsored and advocated for numerous bills to provide sexual assault survivors with adequate rights and resources on a legal level. As an assault survivor, Rehder has shared her stories with the public in multiple ways since the height of the #MeToo Movement in 2017, including a memoir titled *Cinder Girl: Growing Up On America's Fringe* and the release of a personal essay detailing her assault (Rehder 2022). Inspired by the stories of so many people, Rehder became openly determined to make a difference as a lawmaker by championing legislation to help and aid sexual assault survivors and to provide “hope for those who did grow up like me, who are pushed down in the stigma of shame because of addiction or sexual abuse or domestic violence. But also for the people who have the ability to affect change — that they do it, and realize that they have the power to do that” (Missouri Times Interview, Kaitlyn Schallhorn). Senator Rehder’s commitment to enacting legislation because of her personal experiences, and perhaps spurred by the rise of the #MeToo Movement, led the Missouri legislature to pass several successful bills in recent years, including Senate Bill 775 which combines three separate bills to enact recommendations made by the Missouri Rights of Victims of Sexual Assault Task Force.

Rehder’s efforts in Missouri helped ensure that movement activism turned into policy success. Given the rapid rise of #MeToo activism, scholars and the mass public have puzzled over the question of when, where, and how contemporary movements can turn their energy into substantive political and legislative victories. The aim of this research is to understand whether the passage of state-level legislation in the United

States was a result of a social movement or large amounts of collective action. With a specific focus on the #MeToo Movement that went viral in 2017, several states introduced legislation that was concerned with topics such as sexual assault and harassment. Was Rehder's success in Missouri indicative of broader developments, or merely an outlier? Through an examination of two case studies, this thesis will provide a base level for future research to attempt to understand the real, long-term effects of the activism that arose from the #MeToo Movement.

Project Justification

Tarana Burke, the founder of the #MeToo Movement, first initiated change by sharing her own experience as a survivor of sexual assault in order to encourage open discussion about the mass amounts of sexual violence that women face. With 81% of women reporting sexual harassment or assault in their lifetime (MeToo Movement), the issue of providing resources for victims and preventative measures is becoming increasingly important as women's rights continue to be threatened in today's political climate. An analysis of the progress that has been made so far and the steps that still need to be taken in order to achieve gender equality is a necessary step in understanding whether instances of collective action are effective. Since 2017, several states including Missouri, Texas, and Tennessee have passed laws directly relating to sexual assault. These laws provide financial support to survivors and victims of harassment in the workplace, ban nondisclosure agreements, define terms such as sexual assault, and extend statutes of limitations. The #MeToo Movement is "more than just a moment in time" (MeToo Movement); it continues to grow and change as more challenges directed against

women arise in the public sphere. As a result of these changes, the knowledge about survivor-focused resources becomes even more important to the progression and success of this movement.

The #MeToo Movement is one of the few social movements that has emerged and grown in my lifetime. Though it officially began in 2006 under the founding of Tarana Burke, the peak of the movement started in 2017 and was met with an immense amount of press attention. Along with this attention came a unique educational opportunity to attempt to analyze what makes social movement, how movements can affect policy making, and what forms of activism are most effective. As a high school student, these questions were foreign and daunting, but one idea remained as this movement continued to progress: what makes the #MeToo Movement matter? Because this movement is still new and, arguably, still progressing, scholars have largely been unable to understand what the effects are. Existing scholarship on the effectiveness of social movements is often delayed due to the process of waiting for permanent changes to occur, such as legislation. The scholarship regarding the #MeToo Movement is facing the same challenge, therefore presenting gaps in the successes that can be measured after the movement's height and most influential period. Any proposed legislation that stemmed from action around 2017 could potentially take years to pass or fail, leaving a recently available opportunity to analyze more thorough legal and social effects of these actions. Short-term actions like proposed state legislation that occurred between 2013 and 2018 are only indicative of the motivations of the movement itself at that time rather than long-term successes that will lead to "sustainable cultural, legal, and political changes" (Williams, 2019). The purpose of this project will include identifying cases of

successfully passed state legislation related to sexual harassment that followed the rise of the #MeToo Movement in 2017. As a result of every state having had at least one legislative session since the height of the movement, we are better equipped to answer the following questions: What effects has #MeToo had? Does today's activism, which is largely online and decentralized, affect political and policy outcomes? How do movements interact with the political system? Why does this research matter?

This thesis explores how movements influence the enactment of public policies, specifically related to sexual assault. There are numerous ways to think about and measure the success of a movement. This includes the number of well-financed social movement organizations that result from a movement, an increase in public resources pertaining to the given movement, the changing of public opinion, and legislative outcomes. However, this project focuses solely on the success of a movement through legislative outcomes.

Roadmap

This thesis will examine whether mobilization and activism stemming from the #MeToo Movement influenced the passage of sexual assault legislation in Missouri and Texas. This thesis precedes as follows. First, I provide the history and causes of the #MeToo Movement. I then offer an in-depth analysis of relevant literature relating to how social movements affect public policy and online activism versus "traditional" movement politics. The following two chapters focus on the case studies of Missouri Senate Bill 775, followed by Texas House Bill 21, in which I explore the history, content, essential actors, and outcome of the two bills. Finally, the conclusion will define the findings of

the case studies and draw final conclusions about how movements interact with the political system. Through an examination of two case studies, this thesis will provide a base level for future research to attempt to understand whether the activism seen in the #MeToo Movement led to real, long-term effects on policy and legislation in Missouri and Texas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

#MeToo Causes and History

Activist Tarana Burke first coined the term “me too.” in 2006, marking the official start of the #MeToo Movement. Working at a youth camp, Burke encountered a young girl named Heaven who confided in her and shared her own story of being a victim of sexual assault. Out of fear and shame, Burke cut Heaven off and directed her to another counselor, all while wishing she had the same courage and strength as the young girl to say the phrase in her mind: “me too”. Tarana Burke dedicates this moment in her life as the point at which she knew she had to provide resources for survivors of sexual assault and attempt to empower others to find strength in sharing their own experiences(*History & Inception*, Burke).

First founding a nonprofit organization called Just Be Inc. committed to the empowerment of black girls in underprivileged communities, Tarana Burke began to create platforms in which open dialogues about sexual violence could take place. However, it wasn't until Alyssa Milano, an American actress, took to Twitter in October 2017 to share her #MeToo story that the movement began to capture the attention of the masses. In her tweet, Milano shared, “If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet...Me too. Suggested by a friend: ‘If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too.’ As a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem”(*Alyssa_Milano*, 2017). Within twenty-four hours of the post, Milano received 12 million responses on social media (Corbett, 2022). With the immense amount of public discussions sparked by this tweet, the public's

attention was effectively drawn to the extreme lack of protection and resources that women who are victims of sexual violence have.

While Burke continued to advocate for and support survivors, an immense amount of action was taken by the general public. One of the fundamental values within the #MeToo Movement is to create and encourage a platform in which survivors can connect and be supported by one another. While this movement included many traditional forms of activism, such as protests and demonstrations, a large portion of activism took place online with one hashtag going viral: #metoo. With involvement from over 85 different countries, 24 million Facebook engagements, more than 2.3 million tweets, and thousands of people participating in protests and demonstrations, the #MeToo Movement is one of the largest and most accessible movements in recent history (Fox and Deihm, 2017). The open discussion made by survivors of sexual violence rapidly spread across the world, allowing the call for justice to become persistent and public.

The nature and effects of #MeToo activism indicate that the #MeToo Movement is not a traditional social movement. Online activism played a crucial role in public education, mobilization, and participation which ultimately led to measurable consequences. As will become clear, these new forms of digital activism that were utilized by the movement operate in different ways than traditional forms of activism. The #MeToo Movement is a 21st century movement that operates online and seeks to change political agendas.

The next section steps back from the specifics of the #MeToo Movement to explore the broader ways in which social movements influence political outcomes. Scholars in political science and sociology have, in recent years, paid increasing attention

to the outcomes that movements generate, including the formation and building of new organizations, persuasion in the mass public, electoral outcomes, and changes in public policy. In particular, this project focuses on how social movements affect legislative outcomes, specifically public policies related to sexual assault and harassment.

The Consequences of Social Movements: How Movements Affect Public Policy

The formation of the policy agenda is dependent on several factors, including critical windows of time formed by the separate streams of problems, policies, and politics. In *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, John W. Kingdon(1984) discusses the importance of policy windows in progressing solutions in the political climate. While these windows are often unpredictable, “Policy entrepreneurs must be prepared, their pet proposal at the ready, their special problem well-documented, lest the opportunity pass them by” (Kingdon 1984, 173). Without containing this necessary degree of preparedness, advocates of proposals lose imperative time to act on their initiatives. If advocates have their proposals ready at the time of an open policy window, the pressing problem in the public or governmental sphere provides an immediate opportunity to argue that the proposal should be enacted. Kingdon also explores the idea of how the physical timing of events, and people in key positions, have an immense impact on policy windows. In the case that a window opens as a result of a pressing problem or event, that event and the surrounding excitement will naturally settle, subsequently closing the window. This concept is similarly applied to key personnel and administrations, referred to as the “honeymoon”: a figure in power has the highest ability

to make important decisions at the beginning of their term, but after they start to make decisions, public disappointment inevitably results and hinders their capacity to successfully apply action.

Scholars such as Frank R. Baumgartner and Christine Mahoney(2005) discuss the strong link between social movements, public policy, and government actors, suggesting that these factors are strongly intertwined and co-dependent. This in turn challenges other opinions on the matter, such as the Downsian view which states that issues that rise to the public agenda often fade away with little lasting impact on government. In order to create a long-term change on government and public policy, activists and organizations first need to bring their issues to the state agenda, establish governmental resources, and continue to grow and organize as an entire movement. When public opinion changes, whether it is a result of increased social movement activity or some other shift in social values, activists and organizations must create those relationships with political allies in order to enact significant legislation related to social movement issues. Without taking advantage of this window of opportunity, the success of establishing lasting resources relating to the focus of the movement dwindle rapidly.

Stefaan Walgrave and Rens Vliegthart(2005), in their chapter titled “Social Movements, the Rise of New Issues, and the Public Agenda” in David Meyer’s *Routing the Opposition*, discuss the importance and implications of protest agenda. Protest presents the opportunity for citizens to influence and set the agenda, “under specific circumstances protest can exert agenda power and push elites to increase their attention to the underlying issue,” (Walgrave and Vliegthart 2005, 268). This ability is also dependent on the number, type, size, and location of events: as the number of protests and

mobilization efforts rise in a country such as the United States, the number of government hearings about the issue rise as well. Through this understanding, social movements and activists have the power and potential to change political priorities and agendas by first impacting public opinion, news media coverage, and protest (Walgrave and Vliegthart 2005, 260).

Apart from the timing of policy windows and the importance of political allies, social movement organizations(SMOs) that take part in movements themselves are necessary tools to keep their issues politically and socially relevant. Baumgartner and Mahoney(2005) discuss how well-financed SMOs that are associated with a given movement are likely to be given staff resources, which in turn allows the movement to become stronger, “the movement also gains access to new and different information, becomes better skilled at using insider strategy, and ultimately more adept at influencing public policy,”(Baumgartner and Mahoney 2005, 79). As social movements stray from the center of the public’s attention, and policy windows close, SMOs have the capability to sustain government action towards the cause, such as spending and programs, and continue to advance proposals and bring them to the agenda. Though the #MeToo Movement has been so recent, making it difficult to gauge the success of SMOs, several state and federal level organizations have resulted from the movement. For example, Time’s Up Legal Defense Fund, founded in 2018 as a result of the #MeToo Movement, aims to help survivors of sexual misconduct get legal representation. This organization “raised over \$24 million and connected 3,677 people with attorneys to pursue possible legal action”(North 2019), and also provides research and resources to the public in order to keep the topics of justice and resources for victims of sexual violence relevant.

Successful legislation only makes up a portion of the true success of a social movement, while the organizations that are associated with movements create lasting impacts on public policy.

In *Rivalry and Reform*, Sidney Milkis and Daniel Tichenor (2019) explore the critical connection between movement activism and presidential politics. They argue that only when the values, incentives, and political purposes of movements align with presidents do we see the sort of transformative breakthroughs that have periodically occurred throughout American political history. Milkis and Tichenor focus on several key interactive periods during the course of American political development to elucidate their framework and argument. They explore Abraham Lincoln's relationship with the abolition movement, Lyndon Johnson's formative alliance with civil rights activists, and Ronald Reagan's embrace of the emergent Christian right in the 1980s to demonstrate how and when movement activism can transform American politics. Their argument focuses heavily on the alignment between movement goals and presidential prerogatives. While their focus is on national political change, this thesis aims to apply their framework to state-level politics. As I explore the Missouri and Texas cases below, I will analyze whether #MeToo activism aligned with the values, incentives, and objectives of specific lawmakers in state legislatures and evaluate whether this alignment helped produce political success.

Scholars of institutional and political development have also analyzed how savvy political entrepreneurs can exploit institutional ambiguity and moments of opportunity to transform political structures. Adam Sheingate has provided both theoretical and empirical analyses of entrepreneurship and American political development, exploring

how creative political actors shaped the development of the U.S. House in the late-19th and early 20th centuries (Sheingate 2003, 2010). Sheingate largely focuses on how actors operate within the confines of institutional rules. My research in this thesis aims to explore the dynamic interaction between entrepreneurs inside and outside of formal political institutions, namely social activists and state legislatures. Entrepreneurship exists in multiple venues, and by exploring how actors inside and outside of formal institutional settings shape political action, this project seeks to push this line of scholarship into new settings.

Much of the scholarship analyzed up to this point draws inferences and conclusions from historical movements and bygone political eras. Kingdon formulated his classic model of the policy process in the 1980s, when partisan polarization was only beginning to transform the American political landscape. Milkis and Tichenor's analysis of movements' dynamic interactions with presidents draws on historical case studies from the 19th and 20th centuries, and Sheingate's political entrepreneurs were operating under very different institutional and contextual settings than actors today. The next section explores how today's social movements, which are often launched online, involve new political and social technologies, and are just as likely to inhabit digital spaces as they are public parks or the National Mall, differ from movements that emerged in previous eras in American history.

Online Activism Versus "Traditional" Movement Politics. The relationship between social media and social movements has been the subject of much scrutiny for a variety of reasons. Since this relationship is relatively new, given the recent rise of

widespread social media, literature on this topic fails to strongly and consistently identify the effectiveness of online social movements. Social movements are defined as “attempts to intervene in the public sphere through collective, coordinated action” (Tufekci, 2018) which may target changes such as public opinion, a set of policies, or governmental institutions. Though traditional definitions of social movements do not include the idea of social media, as Tufekci mentions, the key aspect of the definition is to understand the current dynamics of the public sphere. With the rapid prevalence of technology, online movements and collective action are becoming increasingly participated in and utilized as a way to spread information, mobilize the public, and make effective governmental and social changes. The #MeToo Movement is one of the clearest examples of a movement that was predominantly online and inspired change, supplied information, and mobilized the public on a large scale.

Criticisms that online activism face are deeply rooted in the belief that it cannot initiate permanent change through one indirect form of mobilization. As Jennifer Earl(2016) discussed in her chapter titled “Protest Online: Theorizing the Consequences of Online Engagement” in *The Consequences of Social Movements*, internet activism is often viewed as “lazy” and absent-minded, and is coined as “slacktivism” to resemble the lack of action it produces. However, current literature identifies several different forms of collective action that are used by online platforms to encourage both on and offline action and even social movements. Brochureware, e-mobilization, online organizing, and online participation are identified forms of internet engagement that possess individual trends, theories, and findings (Bosi et. al., 2013). Online organizing can be used to describe when entire movements and campaigns that have been organized online lead to

measurable “successes,” and online participation details individual interactions and efforts of participation in online activism. Each of these instances of online activism presents the strategies of mobilization and participation used in order to encourage collective action.

Several of these ideas were used and implemented by the #MeToo Movement in order to use online activism to create real change offline. The concept of online participation and organization has direct and indirect outcomes, one of which is the idea that the expansion of the use of the internet is allowing more people to organize and participate in these movements, both as key players and engaged activists. Earl discusses how novelty and size of mobilization are two concepts that are key indicators of a successful movement. With online activism allowing accessible pathways to information and participation efforts that may not be provided otherwise, the number of people that can enact change offline increases dramatically. Despite the “thin” connections between individuals that often are experienced in online activism, this avenue of public engagement allows more widespread, diverse, and informed actions. Through these ideas, the #MeToo Movement’s ability to gain so many participants online encouraged a greater chance of organizing an offline movement that impacted legislation, policies, and resources related to sexual assault and harassment.

Though there are instances of success within each of these forms, they are still met with criticism. These critiques often neglect to identify these factors when defining internet activism, leading to a distraction from what can actually be achieved. In *Routing The Opposition*, David Meyer states “Social movement actors need to be cognizant of the circumstances around them in order to choose strategies and tactics most likely to

work”(Meyer et. al. 2005, 28), drawing on the idea that successful social movements occur when the goals of the movement are presented in ways that are most effective within the structure of the state. In this sense, social media activism can be used as a key supplementary tool to offline activism that includes more geographic, demographic, cultural, organizational, and political factors that can shape when and how public policy is presented (Meyer et. al., 2005). These online factors often need to be paired with some other form of direct action in order to lead to social movement consequences, but they can serve as a fundamental organizational and mobilizing step toward completing their overall goal. My research will aim to address the question of whether online activism can produce the same results as traditional mobilization efforts and tactics.

Jennifer Earl(2016) notes that recent activists and social movement scholars have been more pessimistic about the ability of internet activism to enable change on a larger scale. However, these views don’t accurately represent what the public reports regarding social media and political engagement. According to the Pew Research Center in their study of public attitudes toward political engagement on social media, it was reported that a majority of Americans think social media are important in order to get the attention of elected officials, to initiate social movements, and influence policy decisions with over 50% of U.S. adults reporting positive impressions of all three criteria(Anderson, Monica, et al. 2018. Similarly, 65% of U.S. adults believe that social media helps give a voice to underrepresented groups, drawing on the idea that social media is a key tool in providing an accessible mobilization option to a wide range of people. The relationship between social media and political participation from the public in the United States is generally

positive, but there still remains heavy criticism of the effectiveness of online activism and movements.

Online activism and movements like #MeToo can create an environment within the public sphere that allows change to be initiated through increased conversation, the spread of information, and public demand. “The Effects of Social Movements: Evidence from #MeToo” by Ro’ee Levy and Martin Mattsson discusses the idea that policies that directly arose from the #MeToo Movement can likely attribute their success to the opportunity for policymakers to act as a result of a steep increase of discussions about this topic, rates of reports, and calls to the gaps in policies and the legal system regarding topics like sexual harassment and assault. This dovetails with Meyer’s claim that “Policy is its own cause, and, as such, it structures the opportunities for social movements”(Meyer 2005, 289). There are varying levels of action or success that can arise from a social movement and they are dependent on the avenues and actions the movement can utilize. Sutherland argued that public policy is largely the result of two things: the manipulation of public opinion by the press and the influence of experts on the legislative process (Meyer 2005, 290), indicating just how influential the spread of information and opportunities for the public to participate online can be. Media plays a crucial role in shaping the development, context, and institutionalization of various forms of public policy and also brings in other geographic, demographic, cultural, organizational, political, structural, and institutional conditions that shape when and how public policy is presented. The #MeToo Movement had a large impact on public discourse throughout the U.S., but it did not result in immediate widespread changes to laws or government institutions. The lack of legal changes in the immediate aftermath of

the #MeToo Movement is not surprising given that passing legislation is a lengthy process, often taking more than a year.

METHODOLOGY

Given that the #MeToo Movement only emerged in 2006, and grew exponentially in 2017, scholars in political science, sociology, and related fields are only now beginning to fully explore and understand how this movement has shaped political outcomes. In an effort to contribute to ongoing debates about the effectiveness of online activism and whether and how social movements can inform the policy process, this thesis utilizes case study methods to explore two recent episodes of state-level political change. In subsequent chapters I analyze two cases—Missouri and Texas—where legislators recently debated new policies aimed at addressing sexual assault, harassment, and related issues.

The two cases analyzed in this thesis explore the different mechanisms that led to the respective result in each state. In the case of Missouri, the process and players led to a clear legislative success, whereas the case of Texas provides a more complicated development resulting in a less robust legislative success. The analysis and comparison of these two cases are not meant to be representative of all cases of legislative outcomes in relation to social movements, and the ability to generalize from them will be limited. Rather, the cases and processes presented serve as what Jack Levy (2008) and others refer to as plausibility probes, together forming a preliminary study on relatively untested theories and hypotheses to determine whether more intensive and laborious testing is warranted (see George and Bennett 2005). These case studies are designed to explore how certain factors lead to certain outcomes. Given the contemporaneous nature of this research, such an approach is warranted at this stage in an effort to help future researchers sharpen their concepts, hypotheses, and theories.

Each case study follows a “method of structured, focused comparison,” (George and Bennett 2005). Each case study traces the political and legislative history of the state’s recent policy debates related to sexual assault and harassment. Drawing on the scholarship summarized above, I explore whether and how #MeToo activism opened new policy windows and shaped the policy agenda, how political entrepreneurs inside and outside the legislature influenced the policy process, and the movement’s ultimate effects in each case. Over the course of three months, I reached out to multiple individuals both inside and outside the Missouri and Texas legislatures in order to obtain interviews about their roles and involvement within their respective legislation. However, despite repeatedly emailing and calling these ten individuals, no one was able to meet with me regarding this thesis. As a result, I rely primarily on legislative press releases, records of legislative hearings, the text of legislative bills, and local news coverage to analyze each case. Again, given that these cases occurred relatively recently and have not been subject to extensive research by others, the results of these case analyses are preliminary and speculative. Nonetheless, they provide useful insights for future research on a timely and important development in American politics.

Conclusion

Scholarship dedicated to how social movements interact with the political system brings to light fundamental relationships that contribute to new, successful legislation. Of these relationships, open policy windows, political entrepreneurs, and establishing political allies are a few of the most imperative facts that impact policy agenda. Online activism has largely been criticized for not resulting in real, measurable

change. However, since it can allow a movement to reach a broader audience, online activism can result in an overwhelming demand for resources from the public which in turn can lend itself to opening a policy window. This is not to say, however, that the influence of these factors are solely meant to change legislator's minds, but it is bringing a connected and prepared issue to the agenda that hasn't been brought up before.

In the specific cases presented in Missouri and Texas, these relationships have played important roles in the processes of their respective legislation. With the immense influx of online activism taking place in 2017, a policy window began to open. Senator Rehder took advantage of the shift in public opinion, as well as the public's demand for resources, in order to advance her legislative agenda. In an opposing case, Representative Neave not only experienced the end of her political "honeymoon" when the 2017 legislative session ended, but she also failed to adequately take advantage of the open policy window that resulted from the height of the #MeToo Movement. In the case of Texas, political officials had not prepared proposals in a timely manner, ultimately hindering the amount of agenda setting success that they could achieve.

While both cases presented resulted in legislation that was enacted, we do not yet have the ability to know the true long-term effects of the #MeToo Movement on state legislation. Though social movements are often at the center of policy change, the true extent of their influence is mostly seen through the social movement organizations that are well-financed and active. Though the #MeToo Movement is no longer at the center of the public's attention, the task forces, committees, and organizations that worked closely with the political entrepreneurs must stay active and engaged. The continued efforts of

these organizations over time will stand as the true testament to the effect of the #MeToo Movement on the U.S. political system.

CHAPTER I

MISSOURI

The two state-level cases analyzed in this thesis—Missouri and Texas—help elucidate the conditions under which social movement pressure can produce legislative success. As will become clear, social movement activism on its own is insufficient to produce policy victories. There is a dynamic interplay between movements and political elites. Movement activism can help to open windows of opportunity and launch certain issues to the top of the policy agenda. But movements need allies inside political institutions in order to exploit those policy windows. Drawing on the vast scholarship on agenda setting, policy windows, and the interaction between movements and the policy process, these two cases show how these forces have played out in the era of #MeToo activism.

This case analysis proceeds as follows. First I lay out the timeline and key provisions of sexual assault legislation that the Missouri legislature enacted over the past few legislative terms. I then zoom out to explain how this demonstrates how policy entrepreneurs in the state legislature interacted with movement activists and used the window of opportunity opened up by #MeToo activism to help enact a series of bills that provided protections and resources for survivors of sexual assault and violence.

The Missouri legislature is bicameral, with both chambers being Republican dominant in the 2022 legislative session. Missouri Republican Senator Holly Rehder, sharing partisanship with the majority of the legislature, introduced Senate Bill 775 in the 2022 legislative session. The General Assembly is required to meet annually, beginning in January for a regular session and then again in September for a veto session. The only

other time the legislature meets is if the governor or General Assembly calls for a special session which is reserved for specific legislation.

In Missouri, Republican Senator Holly Rehder used the brief window of opportunity opened by #MeToo activism to fight for policy change in the state legislature. Rehder herself was a victim of sexual abuse as a child, and she took advantage of her position as a political entrepreneur in the Missouri House to turn #MeToo activism into action. As the case will demonstrate, Rehder was a key figure in Missouri's efforts to enact legislation related to sexual violence, assault, and abuse.

Sexual Assault Legislation in Missouri: Timeline and Substance

As a survivor of sexual assault, Missouri Republican Senator Holly Rehder has established herself as a key player and contributor to the #MeToo Movement. Through two impactful publications, a 2017 personal essay detailing her assault and a 2022 memoir titled *Cinder Girl: Growing Up On America's Fringe*, Rehder has been vocal and persistent about creating a system in which survivors of sexual violence can impact the political system and receive resources. In response to the #MeToo Movement, Senator Rehder successfully brought issue to the agenda, including sponsoring Senate Bill 775 which, along with the Missouri Rights of Victims of Sexual Assault Task Force, provides clearly stated directions and rights to victims of sexual assault. Due to the #MeToo Movement and personal experience, Senator Holly Rehder is an influential lawmaker who is determined to make a difference.

In May of 2022, Missouri legislators passed several measures that aimed to protect and provide resources to victims of sexual and domestic violence and trafficking.

Within this package was Senate Bill 775 which went into effect on June 30th, 2022. This bill includes revisions of the language and terminology that is used to form the “Sexual Assault Survivors Bill of Rights” to ensure that victims know their rights regarding the gathering of evidence, medical exams, access to incident reports, and protections from an attacker. The purpose of this “Bill of Rights” is to offer clear guidance to victims, including who to contact and the necessary steps to take after an attack, in order to seek justice in a straightforward manner.

The importance of providing clear definitions within the bill was not specific to the “Sexual Assault Survivors Bill of Rights,” but was also extended toward the terms “sexual contact” and “sexual conduct.” Missouri Republican Representative David Evans spoke on the importance of establishing clear definitions, especially in cases of sexual assault and violence, recalling that at least one case during his 28 years as a judge included hindered prosecution as a result of unclear definitions regarding contact with minor victims, “Taking ambiguous law or badly written law and making it clear is important clearly for the victims of crime but also clarifies, which is required in criminal law, exactly what the crime is” (Missouri House of Representatives, June 2022). With this revision included in Senate Bill 775, the intent of ensuring a clear and fair pathway to justice for all victims.

Other major inclusions within the bill include age specifications regarding prosecution for topics such as prostitution and sexual acts or pornography-related offenses. Sponsored by Republican Representative Ed Lewis, SB 775 also includes that no persons younger than 18 will be prosecuted for prostitution, and rather will be classified as a victim of abuse and referred to the Children’s Division and juvenile

officers to receive the necessary help. The aim of this specification is also to relieve victims of the stigma that may be preventing them from accessing the resources they need, “A lot of times a minor can be in that lifestyle and not even know that they’re being trafficked, not even know that they’re being abused...they’re being abused and used by some adult for their own gain, and we have to get them the help they need to help them to understand that this is not right,” (Missouri House of Representatives, June 2022). Lastly, SB 775 also includes updates on language regarding orders of protection. Sponsored by Republican Representative Lane Roberts, the law will now state that a person with an order of protection against them cannot skip a court date regarding that order and proceed to plead ignorance to knowing it was still in effect. The purpose of this language is to counteract a defense that has been commonly used by abusers who would violate an order and claim they didn’t know it was in place as a result of missing a hearing.

Policy Windows and Political Entrepreneurs Inside and Outside the Missouri Legislature

The increase in social movement activism allows opportunities for activists and organizations to influence lawmakers and public policy. According to Stefaan Walgrave and Rens Vliegenthart (2005) in “Protest and Agenda Setting,” the ability to successfully bring issues to the agenda is commonly done so through protest. This ability relies heavily on the number, type, size, and location of events: as the number of protests and mobilization efforts rise, the number of government hearings about the issue rise as well. In the case of Senator Rehder’s involvement in legislation sparked by the #MeToo Movement, the increase in social movement activism was immediate and vast. Because the movement largely took place online, the number of activists wasn’t confined to one

geographical location which ultimately allowed the movement to influence the entirety of the United States as well as other countries. Paired with that lack of geographic limitation, the number and size of protests allowed actors such as Senator Rehder to almost immediately push her proposal for more expansive legislation regarding sexual harassment and have a mass amount of support.

As explored by scholars such as Frank R. Baumgartner and Christine Mahoney, in order to create a long-term change on government and public policy, activists and organizations first need to bring their issues to the state agenda, establish governmental resources, and continue to grow and organize as an entire movement. In windows of time where public opinion is changed, it is essential to create relationships within the political system. In an analysis completed by Debra Minkoff about variables such as staff size, budget, membership size, tactics, and goals for all civil rights, minority, and women's groups in each year from 1955 to 1988, it is evident that much of the increased government attention to women's issues, while impacted by many factors, can be attributed to the presence of women in the legislature. Whether a window is opened as a result of the appearance of compelling problems, or by happenings in the political stream, establishing political allies within the initial stages of a movement can drastically propel a movement forward. While both Senator Holly Rehder and Representative Victoria Neave established themselves as political allies, Rehder pursued this relationship within the early months of the movement with existing organizations, whereas Neave lacked a sense of urgency and created a new task force to work alongside with. Neave's lack of preparation, paired with the time consuming process of creating the Sexual Violence Task Force to retrieve data, resulted in the missed opportunity to take advantage of an open

policy window. Rehder, on the other hand, worked alongside the existing Missouri Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence in order to progress prepared proposals which successfully led to passed legislation.

The #MeToo movement's explosion in 2017 brought up painful memories for Holly Rehder. She has been forthright about her own experiences with sexual assault, detailing on social media how her grandfather sexual abused her when she was only eleven years old. Although she told her family about the abuse the next day, her grandfather was never charged with a crime. In the wake of #MeToo's rise, she also spoke out about sexual assault committed against her mother and her sister by her mother's boyfriend. Rehder took advantage of her public role to speak out about the issue, stating, "What world changing could we do if we made it to where the shame was on the perpetrator, not on the victim, and that people were apt to speak up, and tell, than to not." She felt a sense of obligation to use her position and the power she has as a lawmaker to make a difference. "God has given me a microphone," Rehder said. "And I've said many times that he didn't give me a microphone to keep my mouth shut," (Taylor 2017).

As noted above, Adam Sheingate discusses the importance of political entrepreneurship when attempting to initiate institutional change. Entrepreneurial innovation is "a speculative act of creative recombination that, when successful, transforms the institutional boundaries of authority"(Sheingate, 198), including challenging existing jurisdictions while also establishing new boundaries to encompass the given innovation efforts. Several questions are integral within this multifaceted idea,

including why entrepreneurs appear when they do and what separates success from failure. Sheingate proposes a few concepts that may influence these factors, paying specific attention to the differing levels of entry barriers that a political system may have in place at any given time. If the degree of institutional permeability is moderately high, resulting in a low amount of success when challenging existing boundaries of institutional authority, a factor such as uncertainty presents opportunities for speculative acts of innovation. In this instance, uncertainty “describes a condition in which the probabilities of alternative outcomes cannot be generated”(Sheingate, 191), which can ultimately produce an opportunity for political actors to exploit ambiguity in the political system in order to gain political advantage and introduce a new dimension into the political system.

Rehder seized the #MeToo moment. She penned a four page essay that detailed her and her family’s experience with sexual abuse. She highlighted the important role of using her position in the legislature and her voice to encourage action. She imagined what the world would look like if more abuse survivors spoke up. What “if telling was more probable than not telling,” Rehder asked. “If we could end the silence?”(Sweeny 2017). Throughout her essay, she encouraged survivors to not feel shame or guilt, but to speak up and disempower their abusers. “For every person out there, young or old, what you are going through, or what you think you have been through does not define you. Find your voice. Tell someone. Even if your abuser is someone you love. Their power lies in our silence,” (Sweeny 2017).

Within the #Metoo Movement, the roles of both a political ally as well as a policy entrepreneur are occupied by Senator Holly Rehder. This can be seen through Rehder’s

involvement in initiating, sponsoring, and advocating for members of the movement, victims of sexual assault, and Senate Bill 775. First involving herself in the movement, Rehder published a personal essay in 2017 detailing her own story as a survivor of sexual assault, saying, “It’s up to those of us who have been there to speak up so that the others in our lives can see they are not alone...When we speak up, we become a beacon of light, that safe place maybe, to those who need it...There’s power in telling. Whether you receive justice or not. It’s a cleansing for your soul that words simply cannot explain. You will stand a little taller knowing that it’s no longer protected by the darkness” (Rehder, 2017). As Sheingate suggested, this initial publication is indicative of Rehder exploiting the uncertainty being produced by the rise of the movement. With the nation experiencing a dramatic influx of public attention to topics such as sexual assault and harassment, Rehder took political advantage of the shift in public demands to spark the preference of the public and begin to initiate institutional innovation. This letter marked Senator Rehder’s insistence for justice in Missouri, beginning with sponsoring bills and, alongside other lawmakers and state organizations, ensuring that they appeared on the agenda.

Conclusion: As this thesis attempts to examine whether activist and social effects of the #MeToo Movement directly impacted passed legislation, the case of Missouri Senate Bill 775 positively affirms this relationship. The rise of the #MeToo Movement in the public sphere resulted in an immense amount of online activism, providing the support and pressure from the public necessary for political actors to introduce their proposed legislation. As the policy window opened, Senator Holly Rehder acknowledged

the opportunity and almost immediately published a personal essay to engage herself as a supporter of, and contributor to, the #MeToo Movement itself. As time went on, Senator Rehder established herself as a political ally and worked closely with organizations such as the Missouri Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence, ensuring that there would be key players to keep these matters relevant even after legislative success. Rather than working to change the minds of legislators, Senator Rehder took advantage of the activism and timing in order to bring the issues of sexual violence to the agenda and pursue well-prepared proposals. By all accounts of the presented scholarship, the #MeToo movement provided the right conditions for political actors to affect the political system.

CHAPTER II

TEXAS

The #MeToo movement's effects in Texas were more complex than in Missouri. As the case will demonstrate, the state legislature's timing and structural constraints made it difficult for political entrepreneurs to seize the policy window opened by #MeToo activism, which led to difficulty and delays in their efforts to enact sexual assault policies. This case analysis proceeds as follows. First I lay out the timeline and key provisions of sexual assault legislation that the Texas legislature enacted over the past few legislative terms. I then zoom out to explain how this demonstrates how policy entrepreneurs in the state legislature interacted with movement activists and used the window of opportunity opened up by #MeToo activism to help enact a series of bills that provided protections and resources for survivors of sexual assault and violence.

The Texas legislature only meets every two years, legislative sessions are limited to 140 days in the state constitution, and only the governor can call the legislature into a special session. Similarly to Missouri, Republicans hold the majority in both the Senate and the House in the 2021 legislative session. Texas Democratic Representative Victoria Neave, taking part in the minority partisanship in the Texas legislature, sponsored House Bill 21 in the 2021 legislative session. Due to being in the minority, Neave and House Bill 21 faced different challenges than the Missouri case previously presented.

Sexual Assault Legislation in Texas: Timeline and Substance

Texas has debated countless bills and proposed legislation that focuses on providing resources to those who are affected by sexual assault or harassment. As a result of the timing of the Texas legislature, Texas's response to #MeToo and the immense calls to action regarding resources for those who have experienced sexual assault or harassment was delayed. The 85th legislature ended in May of 2017, several months before Alyssa Milano's tweet sparked new engagement with the cause of #MeToo. The legislature did not convene again until January 2019, and the 87th legislature regular session began on January 12, 2021, several years after #MeToo gained traction through social media and legislature in other states, leading to a large number of bills on this topic. The 2021 House Bill proposed by Texas State Representatives is just one example of a bill presented in this legislative session with a focus on extending the statute of limitations to applicable sexual harassment complaints. Among the sponsors, State Representative Victoria Neave had a large impact on this bill and others in this session. Neave has openly dedicated the majority of her bills towards women and survivors of sexual and domestic violence which has led to successful and historic actions including the Lavinia Masters Act which addressed the backlog of thousands of untested rape kits, bills to address sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, access to higher education, and more (Texas House of Representatives). Many of Neave's actions have been motivated by an attempt to promote activity towards the lack of actions "that have not addressed the needs of the women of our state." (Victoria Neave Campaign), with an emphasis on the timing of these actions being promoted by the MeToo Movement and the millions of women who spoke out about sexual assault and harassment on social media.

Texas House Bill 21, first introduced and filed on November 9th, 2020, aims to extend the statute of limitations applicable to a sexual harassment complaint filed with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). This bill had a total of 14 sponsors with varying political affiliations and went into effect on September 1, 2021, after being signed by Governor Abbott. The previous statute of limitations in Texas required an employee alleging sexual harassment to file a complaint with the TWC within 180 days of the alleged unlawful employment practice. The bill now permits an employee to bring a complaint with the TWC within 300 days of the alleged sexual harassment. However, these changes of limitations only affect sexual harassment claims, while all other discrimination claims still have the same statute of limitations of 180 days. While HB 21 successfully went into effect in September of 2021, the bill itself faced many challenges, delays, and a condensed focus that differs from the previous case of Missouri Senate Bill 775.

While Representative Victoria Neave had previously passed bills in the 2017 Legislative Session relating to sexual assault, she first engaged in political action related to the #MeToo Movement in 2018 when she formed the Sexual Violence Task Force. This aimed to study systemic issues related to sexual assault and harassment which then influenced proposed legislation. Their focus was “improved data and collection, improving protections for employees who report assault and harassment, campus sexual violence, the rapekit backlog, and improving access to sexual assault nurse examiners” (Neave, April 2018). Over the following two years, this task force along with Representative Neave, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the support of several

other sponsors, Texas House Bill 21 was brought to the agenda of the 87th legislature regular session.

Policy Windows and Political Entrepreneurs Inside and Outside the Texas Legislature

In this case, the role of a political ally and entrepreneur, as discussed by Adam D. Sheingate, was filled by Representative Victoria Neave. However, unlike Senator Rehder in Missouri, the actions and behaviors displayed by Representative Neave failed to contain the level of preparedness, urgency, and support necessary to enact drastic institutional transformations. With the peak of the #MeToo Movement taking place in 2017, the legislative session in which HB 21 was introduced and ultimately enacted was years after peak public demand, suggesting a lack of political and activist movement.

As the main advocate and sponsor of House Bill 21, Representative Neave made crucial mistakes regarding the policy window that opened as a result of the #MeToo Movement. In the 2017 Legislative Session, Representative Neave sponsored several fundamental bills that were successfully passed regarding sexual assault. This includes House Bills 1729 and 4102, which allow people to donate \$1 or more towards the testing of evidence in sexual assault cases when they apply for or renew their driver's license, personal ID card, commercial driver's license, and motor vehicle registration. According to a press release published in April 2018, as of January 2018, these bills successfully resulted in the Texas Department of Public Safety collecting nearly \$150,000 in donations, with over 51,000 people donating between \$1 to \$5,000. With the

enactment of these bills occurring near the rise of the #MeToo Movement, the broader policy window that opened as a result of the movement itself was not seized by Neave in the effective way that it was in Missouri by Rehder.

The importance of an open policy window to pursue sexual assault legislation was lost among state actors in Texas. The lack of urgency, preparation, and support of initiatives are the leading factors that contributed to a sparse legislative session in 2020. Though Neave claimed in a 2019 press conference, “We are ready to make history again. We are in a special time right now that has created an environment where women have found the bravery to speak out. We understand when people say ‘Me Too’” this statement further exemplifies that while actors knew a policy window had emerged, there were no proposals to immediately be pursued. Additionally, relating to Kingdon’s discussion about key personnel and their ability to make effective decisions, Representative Neave faced immense pushback on more expansive bills following the success of House Bills 1729 and 4102. As stated in a 2019 article published by the *Texas Observer*, “Neave filed eight bills related to harassment, none of which passed...Though some of the bills were voted out of committee, they failed to reach the House floor. Neave confirmed that this was due to pushback from the business lobby,”(Groetzinger, 2019). The window provided by Representative Neave’s policy “honeymoon” closed soon after the 2017 Legislative Session due to disappointment and pushback both from the public as well as government institutions. Paired with the lack of urgency and preparation, the policy window spurred by the rise of the #MeToo Movement closed with a lack of robust action committed by political actors.

Representative Neave has dedicated a large portion of her time as a state lawmaker to progress existing, and create new, organizations tied to the #MeToo Movement as well as the Women's March. In addition to the 2018 Sexual Violence Task Force, Neave also helped to organize the Dallas Women's March in both 2017 and 2018. The effort to contribute to and advance organizations and institutions directly related to the #MeToo Movement may be an indication of effective long-term impacts from the movement. As Baumgartner and Mahoney(2005) discuss, social movement organizations are necessary for movements to continue having an impact on the public even after a policy window has closed. In a 2018 interview, Neave discusses her involvement with these organizations and states, "The fact that we have high numbers of women running for office across the country shows that women are ready and are stepping up to run for office,"(Martinez and Holter 2018), acknowledging the importance that these movement organizations have on the public's desire to be more integral actors within the movement as well as political system. In this sense, Representative Neave is creating more robust and accessible resources to progress the values of the #MeToo Movement, ultimately contributing greatly to the long-term success of the movement.

Conclusion. This case of Texas House Bill 21 provides an example of an established relationship between the #MeToo Movement and passed legislation that was not entirely successful. Though the bill was ultimately enacted, the political ally, Representative Victoria Neave, had a flawed course of action as outlined through the presented scholarship. Though the #MeToo Movement created the ideal circumstances to bring proposals to the agenda, Representative Neave was delayed in her introduction of

new, prepared legislation. Additionally, rather than committing to the role of a political ally to an existing group or groups, Neave created a new Sexual Violence Task Force. While the creation of this task force had clear objectives, such as improved data and collection and improving protections for employees who report assault and harassment, it was also time consuming and failed to progress prepared proposals. Open policy windows are critical moments of time in which political actors can bring their issues to the agenda, and in this case, by creating a new organization, Representative Neave wasted crucial time to propose successful policies.

The Texas case demonstrates that social movement activism typically opens brief windows when allies in political institutions need to strike. Given the timing of Texas's legislative calendars, state lawmakers were unable to seize the window opened by #MeToo activism in 2017, since the legislature had already adjourned and did not return until 2019. While a savvy political entrepreneur in a different legislature could have perhaps exploited legislative rules or norms to call the legislature into a special session, this possibility did not exist in Texas. Only the governor can call the legislature into special session. Thus, the possibility of political leadership by an ally of #MeToo like Neave was limited. The Texas case highlights that the interaction between movement activism and policy change is dynamic. There are no iron laws that determine when and how a movement might translate its engagement into policy success. Timing, sequence, and contingency matter a great deal.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Social movements' ability to affect political outcomes like the enactment of public policies is contingent on a number of complex, moving parts. As this thesis demonstrates, new forms of social activism, which frequently emerge and evolve in online digital spaces, can nonetheless shape the political world. While online activism may not produce the sorts of concrete electoral outcomes that traditional protest tactics did (see Gillion 2020; Wasow 2020), it can nonetheless alter the order of the political agenda that legislators draw from when they make policy. The wave of #MeToo activism that erupted in 2017 launched issues like sexual assault and violence to the top of many lawmakers' agenda, which in turn led to the enactment of new laws, policies, and institutions designed to address these issues.

From the case studies we can surmise some preliminary findings regarding how and when #MeToo activism influenced legislative outcomes. The wave of #MeToo activism in the Fall of 2017 dramatically altered the political agenda. It launched issues like sexual assault, abuse, and violence toward the top of the agenda. This opened a policy window that could be exploited. But altering the agenda is insufficient to produce political success. Once an issue is raised on the agenda by movement activism and the policy window is opened, political actors inside institutions must then act to take advantage of the moment.

In Missouri, actors like Representative Holly Rehder seized the moment by telling her own story about sexual abuse, mobilizing supporters in the legislature, and working to enact new laws and building new institutions to address the issues raised by #MeToo.

She has remained actively involved in the fight to end sexual assault and violence. She now sits on a new bipartisan panel in Missouri aimed at improving services for assault survivors and to better respond to cases brought by survivors. Her goal throughout her time in the public light has been to bring issues that were previously ignored or downplayed to the forefront. She notes, “I understand the desire to want to have this in the shadows, as a survivor of it. But it is so incredibly important that we do shine a light on this – that we do work to make the process more efficient and to work for those who have been abused, and to put them through the least amount of pain possible because the process does add to their pain. It adds to the trauma, but it’s so necessary to keep it from occurring again,” (Nelson 2021).

In Texas, the process was more disjointed and complex. Given the timing of the state’s legislative sessions, it was difficult for policymakers to seize the window of opportunity opened by #MeToo. Texas’s legislature was no longer in session in late 2017, and did not convene again until January 2019. Given the rapid pace at which the political agendas in the twenty-first century, the new legislature that met in 2019 was operating on an entirely new political terrain. While savvy political allies like Victoria Neave aimed to take advantage of the increased salience of sexual assault issues raised by #MeToo, her ability to do so was more limited than someone like Rehder, given the timing and sequence of the Texas legislature.

Both cases suggest that #MeToo activism might have scrambled some of the usual political alliances between movements and political elites. Much of the scholarship in American politics has explored how progressive movements like labor, civil rights, and women’s rights have been aligned with the Democratic Party, while conservative

movements like the Christian Right have been aligned with Republicans (see Schlozman 2016; Milkis and Tichenor 2019; Tarrow 2021). But in the recent wave of #MeToo activism and in the cases analyzed above, we see the movement forging alliances across the political spectrum. Rehder, a Republican, was the primary actor in the Missouri case, while Neave, a Democrat, was the prime mover in Texas. This suggests that the movement may have broader scope than other movements, perhaps owing to the troubling and deeply problematic prevalence of sexual violence in American life.

As noted above, the conclusions one can draw from these cases is preliminary. They were designed as plausibility probes to help uncover potential theoretical explanations for the issues at hand. The cases do point toward some theoretical findings, as they highlight the important roles of contingency, timing, and sequence in the processes by which movements translate action and activism into public policies. They also suggest that online activism can shape the political agenda in ways that some critics of online social movements have perhaps ignored or downplayed. But more work is necessary to further explore how twenty-first century social movements can inform the policy process.

As noted by Baumgartner and Mahoney(2005), while social movements are often at the center of policy change, social movement organizations, both within the government and outside, are the greatest long-term impacts on policy change. These organizations are crucial indications that institutions and policy areas can last beyond the closing of the policy window. At this time, it is difficult to know just how many well-funded, resourceful, and successful social movement organizations there are. While there are a few examples presented in this research, such as the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund

and other institutions such as the Sexual Violence Task Force in Texas, future research could aim to measure what organizations and institutions are established in association to social movements in order to gauge a better understanding of the long-term effects of a social movements.

Future research would also benefit from conducting in-depth interviews with individuals and actors that work closely with passing social movement related legislation. As this thesis relies solely on legislative history and news articles, the information provided by actors themselves may provide new insights to the true effect of social movements on the process of agenda setting and policy making. Additionally, future research may be successful in conducting a larger, quantitative analysis of the topics at hand. There are still questions about the broader success of the #MeToo Movement on effecting state and federal policy making that is not addressed in this thesis. While I dive into two specific cases of “successful” legislation related to the #MeToo Movement, there are countless other cases of passed and failed legislation on state and federal levels related to the movement as well.

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