Training social workers for political engagement: Exploring regional differences in the United States

Abstract

Social workers are challenged by the profession's Code of Ethics to engage in social and political action to create social change, and social work education is challenged by our Code and accreditation to prepare students for this challenge. Social work policy educators often need to adapt teaching methods in order to account for differences in the political and social context within which they are teaching. This study uses the Civic Participation Model to assess the regional differences in a political social work training offered in two strikingly different locations in the Eastern and Western United States. This paper describes a case example of an adaptation of a political social work training into a new context that varies significantly in a number of ways from the context in which it was created, including geography, ideology, density, and political structure. Outcomes are discussed, and the article proposes research questions for a larger follow-up study of political social work trainings in a series of diverse geographic areas.

Keywords: political social work, social work education, regional differences, civic participation, civic engagement

Training social workers for political engagement: exploring regional differences in the United States

Effective teaching of policy advocacy within social work requires careful attention to the context in which students and educators live and practice. Strategies to teach policy advocacy that are effective in one location may be less successful if they are adopted in a new location or school without understanding of the differences in context and setting. This paper describes the process of adapting a political social work training into a new context using Woodard's Eleven Nations framework and the Civic Voluntarism Model, discusses outcomes, and proposes study questions for a larger followup study of political social work trainings in a series of diverse geographic areas.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In the social work literature, the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM), adapted from political science (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995), is most often cited to understand political participation. This model focuses on activities with "the intent or effect of influencing government action -- either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies" (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995, p. 38), and includes gaining and using political knowledge, being aware of political issues, contributing money to campaigns or political committees, volunteering, and running for elected office. Within the CVM, political participation requires three key components. First, *resources* such as time, money, and civic skills are considered essential to a person or group's capacity to engage in political activities. The model posits that lack of any of these three will severely hamper political involvement. The second key concept of this model is *engagement*. Engagement can be used to describe many different capacities or activities. In this

model, it covers several key psychological conditions. Verba et al. have found that to be involved, people must have a motivation or desire to participate, have a strong sense of self-efficacy, and feel personally fulfilled and connected to others. Within engagement, *political efficacy* describes an individual's faith in their own ability to make a meaningful impact and changes through political engagement, particularly voting and elections (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). Citizens with political efficacy believe in the political process and their participation in it (Beaumont, 2011; Easton, 1965; Easton & Dennis, 1967; Morrell, 2005; Verba et al., 1995). Since the work of Robert Lane (1959), more than a dozen studies have differentiated two types of political efficacy: internal efficacy and external efficacy. A person with high internal political efficacy believes that he or she understands how to take part in the political process and is not intimidated by obstacles that may occur. Conversely, a person with high external political efficacy views the political system and leaders as responsive and accessible to the general public's needs (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna, & Mebane, 2009).

The last concept, *recruitment*, entails being asked and encouraged to participate in political activity. Verba et al. found that recruitment was most likely to occur within the context of a person's faith-based community, workplace, or voluntary association. For example, Ritter (2008) found that political efficacy, political interest, and political knowledge were associated with higher levels of political engagement. Swank (2012) found that peer request among social work students was the strongest predictor of political participation.

This model has been used in a variety of research examining political participation within the field of social work. Wolk's landmark article about political participation of social workers in 1981 was the first to highlight Verba's explanation of the over-representation of upper status groups, those with the time and resource to participate, in the political system, and to find similar

patterns within social work. Fifteen years later, he highlighted Verba's emphasis on political efficacy in his theoretical model of motivation for social workers in the political arena (Wolk, 1996).

[Insert Table 1 approximately here]

Domanski (1998) examined the political participation of social workers who were leaders in health-related settings and found that, like the general public in Verba's research and model, their participation was much lower in activities such as testifying that required more time, effort, and knowledge. Hamilton and Fauri's survey of social workers' political activity highlighted the fact that NASW members tend to be more politically active than other social workers (2001). This is predicted by Verba's model, but could account for an overestimation of social workers' political activity in many studies, given that NASW members are often the sampling frame for studies of social workers. Hamilton and Fauri found that political engagement was correlated with political activity for social workers, as Verba's model would predict, but that social workers' political activity was not connected to access to resources such as income or education.

Mary (2001) looked at the political activity of social work educators twice, and again found higher levels of activity than the general public. The concerns raised by social work educators as factors they thought minimized their political activity fit into the Verba categories of resources and civic skills.

Ritter (2008) used Verba's model to compare social workers to the general public by examining predictors of political activity among licensed social workers in eleven states across the country. Social workers differed from the general public in four major ways. First, as found in other studies, while the general public was less likely to become politically active if they had less time and money available to them, social workers participated in political activity regardless

of their available resources. Second, while degree of partisanship predicted political activity in the general public, it did not predict political activity among social workers. This lack of predictive ability for partisanship may reflect the relative homogeneity of social workers, who reported being primarily registered Democrats and fairly liberal. Third, in terms of recruitment, Ritter found that while a majority of the social workers she surveyed belonged to a church or another non-political voluntary organization, very few reported that they had been recruited into political activity through that network. Finally, within the context of political skills, Ritter asked her sample of social workers an additional question: whether they felt that their social work education had provided them with the skills they would need to engage with the political system. Approximately half of the respondents felt that they had learned these skills in their social work education, while the other half disagreed.

Rome and Hoechstetter's 2000 survey of NASW members' political engagement highlighted a divide in the profession between those with high and low levels of political involvement (Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010). BSW and MSW respondents were equally divided, but PhD respondents were more likely to identify with high levels of involvement. Those who were older and more experienced had higher levels of involvement. As with Ritter's sample, there were mixed opinions about whether social work education had prepared them well for political engagement. [Author, 2011] surveyed social workers who had run for political office. They identified the importance of recruitment in their political action, particularly in running for office. They differed from the model in that recruitment within faith networks was much less important than recruitment by friends, current elected officials, political activists, and professional networks. Recruitment by spouses and family members were also important.

Swank's 2000 survey of undergraduate social work students found few differences based on income, marital status, or, understandably, educational level. Identification as an activist was a strong predictor of political activity (Swank, 2012). [Author's] 2016 qualitative study of clinical social workers described women who were clinical social workers expressing lack of resources, including time and civic skills, as well as lack of efficacy, which the respondents connected with low levels of political engagement.

Finally, the researchers at the [Author-affiliated organization] have used Verba's model to inform political social work trainings, finding that increasing political efficacy was correlated with increased plans for political action by training participants [Author et al., 2017, Author et al., 2018].

Context and Political Action

Social work learning and practice is deeply embedded in social and political contexts. Certain practice contexts are given attention in the academic literature, for example: rural vs. urban practice, and practice with specific groups such as immigrants and refugee populations. The CVM has been used in a variety of geographical contexts, including internationally in Britain (Whitely, 2011), Ghana (Bob-Milliar, 2012), Romania (Tatar, 2015), Spain (Serrat, Villar & Celdran, 2015), and Sweden (Lidstrom, 2013), among others. Within the United States, the CVM has been used to examine gendered and racial political differences in the South, where Fullerton and Stern paired it with the strategic mobilization perspective to help explain a narrowing of the gap in political participation between African-American and white southern voters, and the ways in which gender and race affected each other over time (Fullerton & Stern, 2010; Fullerton & Stern, 2013). It was also used with Latino immigrants in the Midwest, where it was combined with Bordieu's civic habitus lens to explain the connections between

immigrants' political activity in their home country, association with a political party, and political participation in the United States (Sandoval & Jennings, 2012). Levin-Waldman (2013) used the framework to discuss the consequences of the diminishing middle class and rising income inequality on New York City political participation.

The analysis of geographical context applied in conjunction with the CVM framework in this study is drawn from Woodard (2011), who makes a compelling argument for the existence of regional differences that go beyond the traditional Republican and Democrat, rural and urban distinctions already highlighted in social work's academic curriculum, to include profound religious, ideological, and ethnographic characteristics between distinct regions throughout the United States and North America. These differences include widely varied opinions on the function and role of government, which has a direct impact on the role of social workers as participants in the political process. In this article, we highlight two contrasting regions of the U.S., described as "nations" by Woodard, the *Far Wes*t and *Yankeedom*.

Far West

As described by Woodard (2011), the Far West roughly includes the states of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, the Eastern/interior sections of California, Oregon, and Washington, the western half of the Dakotas and Nebraska, northern Arizona, and British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and most of Alaska. Woodard connects the culture of this vast Far West region to an uneasy dependence on large corporations and the federal government for survival, particularly in areas where the land does not lend itself easily to agriculture. The Far West, he argues, could flourish only with an influx of resources including heavy mining equipment, railroads, dams, and irrigation systems. As a result, some regions were "colonized" by capital interests in large cities such as San Francisco, Chicago, and New York, and benefitted

from federal funding and projects. The federal government owns 47% of the land in western states, with the highest rate of federal land ownership in Nevada at 85% (Ballotpedia, n.d., Bui & Sanger-Katz, 2016). By contrast, Connecticut, located in Yankeedom, ties with Iowa for the lowest percentage of federal land ownership, at 0.3% (Ballotpedia, n.d.). The uneasy balance between federal support and dislike of centralized government in the Far West results in anger at federal government interference, which occurs at the same time as the region needs continued financial and infrastructure supports. This tension was highlighted in 2014 by the armed standoff of rancher Cliven Bundy, who was arrested after an armed standoff with federal agents over his right to be on federal land that his family had farmed for generations. His case was thrown out and he was released from custody in January 2018 (Ritter, 2018). On the other hand, corporations in the Far West are seen favorably by the political structure, with some of the U.S.' lowest corporate tax rates in Far West states.

Yankeedom

In contrast, Yankeedom, which primarily includes a smaller but relatively populous area of upstate New York, and the New England states of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts, gathers attitudes and norms from the cultural values of its Puritan founders who sought to create a better society through social engineering and the common good. Of Woodard's eleven outlined "nations," Woodard (2011) argues that Yankeedom places the highest value and faith in the government's ability to effect positive change. Yankeedom is characterized by a middle-class ethic, the importance of intellectual achievement, and a drive to improve society through extensive citizen involvement in the political process.

Far West versus Yankeedom

There are many political comparisons between the two states that can highlight some of these differences of "nations," many of which are highlighted in Table 2. The state legislature of Nevada in the Far West meets once every other year for 100 days. In contrast, the state legislature of Connecticut in the nation of Yankeedom meets for three months in even-numbered years and five months in odd-numbered years. These regions have different profiles on a number of issues, including politically. For example, voter turnout in Nevada in the 2018 midterm election was 47.5% of eligible voters and 41% of the voting age population. This latter number includes the 327,876 people who aren't eligible to vote in Nevada due to citizenship, prison, probation, parole, or felony conviction. The voter turnout rate in Connecticut was 54.4% of eligible voters and 49.8% of the voting age population. The latter includes 241,847 people who cannot vote because of citizenship, prison, parole, or felony conviction—in Connecticut, those on probation are eligible to vote (United States Election Project, n.d.).

[Insert Table 2 approximately here]

Woodard makes it clear that these regions are not homogenous, and political differences between exist within these two regions as well, including access to voting, availability of methods of transportation to the polls, number of political positions available, and accessibility of legislators. The above also affect the social work profession, the perception of the profession, and the makeup of the profession. For example, state funding of social services varies significantly between the two states. The total number of licensed social workers in Nevada in 2016 was 2,943 (State of Nevada Board of Examiners for Social Workers, 2016) while the total number of licensed social workers in Connecticut was 6,915 in 2014, the last year data was available (Connecticut State Department of Public Health, n.d.). This means that in

Nevada, there is one social worker for every 992 people, while in Connecticut, there is one social worker for every 517 people.

Yankeedom versus the Far West: A Case Example

The Political Social Work Training (PSW) described here is an initiative of two schools of social work which was created to train social workers and social work students for leadership positions in political campaigns, their own runs for elected office, and leadership in social change. It has been held annually since 1996 at a large northeastern university in Connecticut, in Yankeedom. Participants in the training are a mixture of current students, social work practitioners, and those who are involved with human service organizations in the community, as board members, staff, volunteer, or clients. It is an intensive training lasting between one and two days. In addition to the research on efficacy and Beaumont's work, this training is heavily influenced by evaluation research by the authors ([Author, 2011]), previous work by Domanski (1998), and Hamilton and Fauri (2001), and input from alumni and experts in the field.

The program consists of three modules, all led by experienced political social workers who have professional experience in the political arena. The first module is a detailed course in the language and processes of electoral campaigns in the United States. This module is designed to build knowledge and skills around campaign planning, messaging, opposition research on oneself, asking for money, and developing materials and strategies for voter contact. The second module of the PSW curriculum presents an opportunity to learn from the experiences of local social workers who have run for political office and/or worked in political employment. Panels, workshops, and small-group interactions allow participants to get a realistic sense of the experience of running for office and learn from the successes and challenges of those who have come before them. The third module is an interactive experience for participants to plan their

own political development. Participants use what they have learned to develop an individualized political plan, set goals for their political work in the next five years, and commit to first steps toward their political futures. All three sections include activities designed to build internal and external political efficacy of participants. A detailed agenda of the training can be found in the appendix of a previously published work by [Author et al.] (2017).

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to consider the differences between students coming from the two different regions, the process of modifying the training for two separate locations, and the comparative effectiveness of the training in the two locations. In order to reach that goal, the following questions were asked:

Research question #1: How did the two groups compare before the training in demographics, ideology, efficacy, and planned political activity?

Research question #2: How was the training modified to address the different contexts of Yankeedom and the Far West?

Research question #3: How did the two groups compare after the training in efficacy, attitudes, and planned political activity?

Methods

The data described here include the reflections of the social work educators who created and engaged with students during the training, as well as data collected from participants through a voluntary self-administered, self-report survey. Before the survey was administered, permission to study human subjects was obtained from the Institutional Review Boards of authors' institutions; the study was deemed exempt.

Measurement

The instrument used for data collection has been used for evaluation of the political social work training since 2015. It includes standard scales for political efficacy developed for the American National Election Survey (n.d) (ANES), later refined by Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991) to operationalize internal and external political efficacy using an eight-item scale. All of the items have five Likert responses that range from strongly disagree to strongly agree and a total score ranging from 0 to 32, with high scores indicating strong efficacy. The internal political efficacy scale has four questions: “How often do politics and government seem so complicated that you can't really understand what’s going on?”; “How well do you understand the important political issues facing our country?”; “How much do public officials care what people like you think?”; and “How much can people like you affect what the government does?” and this subscale scores range from 0 to 16. The external political efficacy scale also includes four questions: “There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence what the government does”; “Under our form of government, the people have the final say about how the country is run, no matter who is in office”; “If public officials are not interested in hearing what the people think, there is really no way to make them listen”; and “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does” and a subscale range from 0 to 16.

The survey also included a 22-item scale adapted from Rome & Hoeschstetter (2010) assessing the political behavior of social worker. This scale includes “active” behaviors such as contacting legislators, actively campaigning for candidates, testifying at hearings, attending marches or rallies, contacting the media, and joining community groups that advocate for policy change as well as “passive” behaviors such as keeping up with the news, identifying one's legislative representatives, following the progress of legislation, sharing political opinions with others, and discussing policy issues with friends and colleagues. The active scale (α=.763) has

11 items with a score range of 0-44. The passive scale (α=.853) is comprised of 11 items with a score range of 0-44.

Participants at each training were given the pre-test prior to the start of training and a post-test at the conclusion of the training. Informed consent was provided in writing and described verbally by a researcher at the start of the training. Completion of the survey was considered consent to participate in the study. Surveys were placed in manila envelopes to ensure anonymity. The same protocol was followed for completion of the post-test, without the full description of informed consent, but with a reminder that participation was voluntary.

Sampling

The survey was distributed to all attendees (N=67) of the political social work trainings in Nevada and Connecticut during March and April 2016. The response rate was 97% (n=67) for the pre-test and 67% (n=46) for the post-test. Univariate analysis was employed to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample.

As described in Table 3, for the 67 participants who completed the pre-test survey, the mean age was 34 years (M=34.8, SD=12.8). The sample was predominantly female (68%), white (69%), heterosexual (71%), and not Hispanic or Latino (89%). More than two-thirds of the sample had completed college (70%). Most respondents were registered to vote (97%) and the majority identified as registered Democrats (76%). See Table 3 for more details.

[Insert Table 3 approximately here]

Limitations

The limitations to this study include the sampling and size. Because the sample size is small, and members are from two geographic areas, the generalizability of the study is limited. Although the sample from Connecticut is twice the size of the sample from Nevada,

those proportions do represent the proportionate number of social workers in each state. The second major limitation of this study is the use of a self-report measure administered immediately after the training. The results reported by the respondents may reflect social desirability rather than actual changes, and they may not be maintained over a longer period of time. A third concern is the drop-out rate of participants from pre-test (N=67) to post-test (N=46). It is possible that the effect of this study did not persist after the end of the training--a longitudinal study of all of the participants of this training from multiple years is being planned to assess the long-term outcomes.

Results

Research Question #1: Changes in Training

Modifications were made between the two locations based on needs of students and political and geographic context. The significant differences between the two locations were many. As discussed in Woodard (2011), the relationship between government and governed in the Far West holds a lot of tension, which is often reflected in more skeptical attitudes toward government and politics. This also translated, understandably, during the PSW training to polite but noticeable skepticism of outsiders coming from Yankeedom who weren't familiar with local politics or the "Nevada way of doing things." The trainers addressed this issue by ensuring that there was a Nevada faculty member who was the champion of the PSW training in Nevada and helped to navigate the differences between the two settings. However, because she was both an academic and not native to the region, her presence may not have been enough to combat that skepticism. In addition, this was the first time the training had been offered in Nevada, so there was not an existing level of support and confidence in the training.

The PSW training in Connecticut, by contrast, occurs within the region with the highest

overall faith in the government's ability to effect positive change (Woodard, 2011), as seen in the efficacy scores of participants. Woodard characterizes Yankeedom as prioritizing intellectual achievement and extensive citizen involvement in the political process. In Connecticut, the PSW training attendees had a higher level of educational attainment, and the context in general in Connecticut includes more graduate-level social workers who are engaged within the government, including a large number of social workers who have run for or held political office. This context, combined with the established nature of the training, led to a more solid group buy-in from the beginning.

Both trainings took place during the contentious 2016 US presidential election primary season, which created a different dynamic in both places than had been seen in previous years. Participants discussed healthy concerns and frustrations in the major political parties, the electoral process, and the systemic racism and other bias within the US electoral system that had not been a significant part of previous trainings. This has been an ongoing trend in more recent trainings, and has been used to adapt the trainings to include more information about working outside of major parties, racism and bias within the electoral system, and the experiences in particular of non-White candidates in running for office.

Given that the overall voter turnout is higher in Connecticut than Nevada, and that the state legislature meets longer and more frequently (United States Election Project, n.d.), it is not surprising that there are more resources available in Connecticut that train social workers about advocacy and civic engagement. The resources available in Nevada are excellent, but fewer, and spread over a wider area. Because of this, the Nevada PSW training focused more on topics related to advocacy and had advocates and lobbyists participating in panels, in addition to elected social workers. In Connecticut, where advocacy is covered often in other trainings, the training

focused almost exclusively on electoral politics and the experience of running for and holding office. Although there is political diversity in both areas, the speakers in Connecticut generally assume they are speaking to a more liberal audience, while Nevada speakers endeavored to speak to a more moderate audience.

Another difference between the two was the availability of panelists who were both social workers and politically experienced. Given the long-standing nature of this training in Connecticut, program alumni are available to serve on the panel of elected officials, leading to a group of approximately 20 panelists who are available to participate in most years. Ten were chosen for this year. In Nevada, non-social workers were included on the panel of elected officials because the number of potential panelists was limited. A total of six panelists spoke, some of whom were also participants in the overall training as well as panelists.

The social work department in Nevada is smaller than in Connecticut, and course scheduling is done in different time blocks, providing less opportunity for faculty members to attend the training or encourage their students to do so. This resulted in many people being unable to attend the full training, which may have affected the training's effectiveness or their experience of it. In Connecticut, because this is a long-standing training, other events are arranged around this training, and faculty are commonly able to excuse students from other obligations to attend.

Finally, it should be noted that this was the first time replicating the PSW training outside of Yankeedom, and many lessons were learned through the process that have informed future replications. For example, given the difference in scheduling between the two schools, future trainings have been scheduled farther in advance to allow for attendees to stay throughout the entire training, which gives them the most benefit and is less disruptive.

Although it is not the primary purpose of this article to gauge training outcomes, we can begin to explore the effectiveness of the tailored intervention by comparing the percentage of respondents who planned to work on campaigns between the beginning and end of the training, since this is one of the main training goals. Before the training, less than half of each group had volunteered on a campaign, including 40% of the Connecticut group (N=18) and 45% of the Nevada group (N=10), while 71% (N=32) in Connecticut and 82% (N=18) in Nevada planned to do so before training. Very few had worked for pay on campaigns, including 13% of the Connecticut group (N=6) and 5% of the Nevada group (N=1), or planned to work for pay on campaigns (62% of Connecticut, N=28, and 45% of Nevada, N=10). The numbers of students planning to engage in these activities went up substantially after the training. After training, 82% of Connecticut participants (N=32) and 53% of Nevada participants (N=8) planned to work for pay on campaigns. After training, 85% of Connecticut (N=33) and 100% of Nevada participants (N=15) planned to volunteer on a campaign after training. Based on these findings, training appears to have had an impact in both locations, but more so in Connecticut.

Research question #2: How did the two groups compare before the training in demographics, ideology, efficacy, and planned political activity?

[Insert Table 4 approximately here]

Differences between the two groups prior to training are described in Table 4. We had expected to find more differences between the two groups based on the demographics of the area and our experiences of the training; the lack of statistically significant differences could be due to the relatively small sample size. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean age of the Nevada cohort with the Connecticut cohort. There was not a significant difference between the mean ages of the Nevada cohort (*M*=36.68, *SD*=12.92) and the

Connecticut cohort (*M*=33.81, *SD*=12.78); $t(63)=.853$, $p=0.85$. Chi-square tests were performed to examine the relationship between student location and the following demographic variables: race/ethnicity (χ^2 (3, N=62) = 1.86, $p = .60$), Latino/Hispanic status (χ^2 (1, N=65) = .097, $p = .75$), sexual orientation (χ^2 (3, N=63) = 3.60, $p = .31$, gender (χ^2 (2), N=66) = .52, $p = .77$), and highest degree completed. Only the relationship between student location and highest degree completed was significant, χ^2 (4, N=64) = 22.96, $p < .001$. Nevada participants were less likely to have completed an undergraduate or graduate degree. Chi square test results indicated no significant differences between cohorts for voter registration (χ^2 (1, N=67) = 1.01, $p = .31$) or party affiliation (χ^2 (4, N=62) = 4.34, $p = .36$).

Using independent samples t-tests, we compared the mean scores for fiscal and social ideology between the Nevada cohort and the Connecticut cohort. There was no significant difference between the mean score for fiscal ideology of the Nevada cohort (*M*=0.77, *SD*=.87) and the Connecticut cohort (*M*=0.53, *SD*=.83); $t(58)=-1.09$, $p=0.28$. Similarly, there was no significant difference between the mean scores for social ideology of the Nevada cohort (*M*=0.45, *SD*=.67) and the Connecticut cohort (*M*=0.19, *SD*=.51); $t(61)=-1.72$, $p=0.09$).

There was a statistically significant difference in overall political efficacy before the intervention between the Nevada cohort (*M*=18.5, *SD*=3.13) and the Connecticut cohort (*M*=19.9, *SD*=2.51), with Connecticut participants demonstrating a stronger political efficacy; $t(58)=2.03$, $p < .05$. This scale ranges from 0 to 32, so both of these groups scored toward the middle of the scale, with Connecticut slightly higher.

Using independent samples t-tests, we compared the mean scores for pre-intervention planned political activity between the Nevada cohort and the Connecticut cohort. There was no significant difference between the mean score for pre-intervention planned political activity of

the Nevada cohort (*M*=24.7, *SD*=6.45) and the Connecticut cohort (*M*=24.9, *SD*=7.87); *t*(55)=.10, *p*=0.92, suggesting the two groups were similar in their plans for political action before training started.

Examining individual political behaviors, the Nevada cohort was less likely than the Connecticut cohort to agree with the statements “social workers should run for state office” (X_2(1, N = 58) = 5.86, p = .02) and “social workers should run for federal office” (X_2(1, N = 57) = 9.39, $p < .01$).

Research question #3: How did the two groups compare after the training in efficacy, attitudes, and planned political activity?

[Insert Table 5 approximately here]

There was a statistically significant difference in overall political efficacy sustained through the intervention, with significant differences found between the Nevada cohort (*M*=18.7, *SD*=1.87) and the Connecticut cohort (*M*=20.3, *SD*=2.61) at post-test; *t*(49)=2.07, $p < .05$, essentially suggesting the Connecticut group started and ended with slightly higher confidence in their ability to intervene in the political system than the Nevada group.

Using independent samples t-tests, we compared the mean scores for post-intervention planned political activity and mean change scores for planned political activity between the Nevada cohort and the Connecticut cohort. There was no significant difference between the Nevada cohort (*M*=26.6, *SD*=3.9) and the Connecticut cohort (*M*=26.0, *SD*=7.6) for post-intervention planned political activity; *t*(43)=-.25, *p*=0.80. There was no significant difference between the change scores for planned political activity of the Nevada cohort (*M*=2.7, *SD*=5.8) and the Connecticut cohort (*M*=1.6, *SD*=6.1); *t*(38)= -.552, *p*=0.58.

Individual past and planned political behaviors were measured again at post-test. As discussed above, both groups were unlikely to have worked for pay on political campaigns before the training (13% of Connecticut participants, and 4% of Nevada participants at pre-test). Both groups were likely to plan to do so after the training, but the training seemed to be more effective in convincing Connecticut participants to do so (82% of Connecticut participants planned to do this, compared to 53% of Nevada participants at post-test, $X2(1, N = 54) = 4.65$, $p = .04$. In contrast, Nevada participants were more likely to plan to use social media to organize and engage in politics (100%) than Connecticut participants ($X2(1, N = 53) = 4.28$, $p = .04$). At post-test, the Nevada cohort was also less likely than the Connecticut cohort to agree that social workers should run for local office ($X2(1, N = 46) = 7.34$, $p = .02$). Although not statistically significant, at post-test fully 20% of Nevada participants indicated they had chosen in the past to not vote in order to demonstrate dissatisfaction with certain elements of the political system, compared with only 3% of the Connecticut cohort.

Discussion

The small sample size is a limitation in drawing conclusions based on these findings, but they pose interesting questions for future work. The Nevada/Far West and Connecticut/Yankeedom cohorts had many similarities--both groups were primarily female and white. The majority of both groups were students. Nevada social work students had less political efficacy than Connecticut students both before and after the training. This result may support Woodard's (2011) theory that students from Yankeedom would be more assured of their role and agency within the political system than students from the Far West, where cultural norms of government distrust and dependency may influence the political efficacy of residents. The Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995) would predict that political

involvement would be lower for individuals who are lower in both education and political efficacy; however, this study found no statistically significant differences in political behaviors between the two groups. Future studies which look at the actual political activity of both groups would help to understand how these differences play out over time. Barreto, Collins, Leslie & Rush's work (2018) suggests that for non-White participants, particularly those who are African-American, views of racialized systems contribute to these differences as well.

Although there were differences in political efficacy, both cohorts had high levels of planned political activity. The change score from pre-test to post-test for planned political activity was larger for the Nevada cohort, although the difference was not statistically significant. One caveat: it is difficult to know how to interpret the planned political activity scores of members of the trainings who were students, because undergraduate and early graduate students are often immersed in an academic environment and may not be thinking realistically about life after graduation.

The Nevada cohort, although reporting an older mean age, was not as advanced in their education; there were more undergraduate students attending the training. The experience, and education level of Nevada students may have impacted political efficacy. Rome & Hoechstetter's work (2010) found that older and more experienced social workers were more likely to engage with the political process, as would be predicted by the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). Interestingly, despite lower political efficacy, the Nevada students were just as likely as the Connecticut students to report an intention of future engagement with political systems.

As discussed above, the facilitators of the training noted a qualitative difference in tone and feeling with the Nevada training, finding the Nevada participants to be less outwardly

engaged with the material. This difference could be regional or cultural. Woodard (2011) suggests that the Far West is rooted in fierce independence and a healthy skepticism of outside ideas and influences. It could also be that the warmth and engagement experienced by facilitators during Connecticut trainings was due to the training being largely internal (delivered by the host university for a group who had many connections to the host institution and region). The Nevada training, by contrast, was delivered by outside consultants over a short period of time. There may have been fewer personal connection among the audience members as well. The Connecticut trainings are delivered primarily to students, and although many of them come from different universities, the experience of being social work students may connect them in significant ways. In Nevada, the audience had a higher proportion of professionals and community members who were attending for CEUs or out of general interest.

Implications for Social Work Education

As social workers know well, context matters. An integrated micro/macro approach to social work education provides the necessary foundational skills required to engage effectively in the political process (Haynes & Mickelson, 2006; Myers & Granstaff, 2008). However, Reisch (2016) found that many social work programs provide minimal attention specifically to macro content and dedicate few resources to foster interest of macro practice with students. Teaching students to engage in policy practice (CSWE, 2015) must involve tailoring the teaching and learning experience to relevant social, political, and educational contexts. To effectively harness the energy and intention that appears consistent between these two cohorts, students in less culturally-political climates may benefit from more hands-on learning opportunities where they can achieve small successes to boost their efficacy (Ritter, 2013).

On the other hand, social work students appear to be more alike than different - particularly in their commitment to political change and intention to engage in the political process. But if students are learning most of their practice in field placement settings - of which few are macro [Author, 2014] - they are learning the attitudes, beliefs, and habits of their regional cultural understanding of political efficacy, in addition to whatever they bring in from their life experiences and families of origin. One of the regional differences was the low number of social workers in public office in Nevada - it was a challenge to find six panelists to participate, and only one was an elected social worker - as opposed to Connecticut, where there is an ample pool of social workers in public office to participate in the training. With fewer social workers in public office, there are fewer opportunities for political field placements in which students can practice and learn the skills of political social work. This affects the opportunities for recruitment, one of the core tenets of the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995), as well as the opportunity for social work students to see themselves as potential elected officials.

For students in regions where political efficacy is low and social workers are not as well represented in political practice, classroom learning and professional development must provide opportunities for students to develop professional attitudes and skills not yet common in regional practice. The sample size here was not large enough to examine differences between these two groups in depth, which future research should explore. Further work is necessary to determine the effectiveness of short-term trainings on political efficacy and actual behavior change and ways this can connect with social work education.

The implications of this training may also carry past policy courses, since recent research suggests that social justice courses may also influence students' political participation, civic

engagement, and activism (Krings, Austic, Gutierrexz & Dirksen, 2015). Future work should examine similar differences as they address other courses and their influence on political participation across geographic differences.

Implications for Future Research

If, as this analysis suggests, there are regional differences in student attitudes and beliefs around their own political efficacy, it would benefit social service students and professionals to learn more about those differences in order to support and promote political engagement. This analysis was constrained by a small sample size. Future work should anticipate subtle differences and strive to get larger sample sizes, as social work students tend to have similar professional values and political vantage points.

Future efforts could explore other regional and geographic differences. While this analysis examined students from the Far West and Yankeedom, there are other regions with unique social and political climates that could have a significant impact on students' and professionals' political efficacy and engagement. These also represent very large geographical areas, and there might be differences within those regions that also demand study. Future research should examine snapshot data of training participants across a variety of geographic regions, including those that are both rural or urban.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of longitudinal data that speaks to actual political behavior, rather than planned behavior. Tracking political engagement over time is a better measure of the impact of political training than intention to participate in the political process, particularly when measured immediately following the training. Although we are encouraged by students reporting high levels of planned political engagement, longitudinal data would give insight to the long-term retention of changes in values, skills, and knowledge

stemming from educational experiences. It would also provide opportunities to examine whether the predictions of the Civic Voluntarism Model hold true for social workers and are constrained by geography, in a way that hasn't been done since Ritter's landmark 2008 study. In addition, longitudinal data should examine the connections between efficacy, planned behavior, and actual behavior.

Finally, it is not possible in the small group examined here to look at the effects of gender and race, but given their effects on political participation in general (Barreto, Collins, Leslie & Rush, 2018) and among social workers in particular (Meehan, 2018), we encourage future researchers to include discussions of race and ethnicity in both sample selection, survey questions, and training materials.

Conclusion

Training social workers and social work students for political engagement is a challenging adventure, particularly given today's political climate. This research finds preliminary evidence that political efficacy may be affected by regional social and political contexts. We strongly encourage future research on regional differences, so that our education and training can more effectively promote social work values and competencies, particularly in this area. This research can affect not only political training such as the one described here, but other aspects of social work education and continuing education that require educators and participants to understand, engage with, and respond to their particular context. Consideration of regional differences and their interaction with factors like race, ethnicity, and gender can help social work educators better prepare the next generation of political social workers.

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Table 1

Support for the CVM model (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995) among social workers

CVM model factors leading to increased political engagement:	Research support of the CVM model applied to social work students and professionals:
Resources Time Money Civic skills	Domanski (1998): social work participation was much lower in political activities that required more time, effort, and knowledge. Mary (2001): social work educators felt that lack of resources and civic skills minimized their political activity Rome & Hoechstetter (2010): compared with BSW and MSW respondents, PhD level social workers were more likely to identify with high levels of involvement. Author (2016): women who were clinical social workers described a lack of resources, including time and civic skills, as connected to low levels of political engagement.
Engagement	

Motivation/desire to participate Self-efficacy & political efficacy Personal fulfillment	Ritter (2008): found that political efficacy, political interest, and political knowledge were associated with higher levels of political engagement. Swank (2012): identification as an activist was a strong predictor of political activity Authors (2017; 2018): increasing political efficacy was correlated with increased plans for political action by training participants
Recruitment Being asked to participate Membership in faith, voluntary, and workplace organizations	Swank (2012): peer request among social work students was the strongest predictor of political participation. Hamilton and Fauri (2001): NASW members tend to be more politically active than other social workers Authors (2011): social workers who had run for political office identified the importance of recruitment in their political action, particularly in running for office.

Table 2

Characteristics of Connecticut (Yankeedom) and Nevada (Far West) as of 2016

Characteristic	Connecticut	Nevada
Voter turnout	66.3%	62.5%
Population	3,572,665	3,034,392
Voting age population	2,844,258	2,312,576
Area (in square miles)	5,543	110,572
Rank in size	48th	7th
Population density	6th	41st
Number of polling places	744	1,853 (85% of these are in Clark and Washoe counties, near Las Vegas and Reno)

Average # of polling locations per miles	6.5	59.7
Average # of voting age residents per polling location	3,823	1,248
Licensed social workers	6,915 (as of 2014)	2,943

(Ballotpedia, n.d.; Connecticut State Department of Public Health, n.d.; State of Nevada Board of Examiners for Social Workers, 2016; United States Election Project, n.d.)

Table 3
Sample demographics, N=67

	Frequency	Percent
Gender (n=66)		
Female	45	68.2
Male	20	30.3
Transgender	1	1.5
Hispanic/Latino (n=65)		
Yes	7	10.8
No	58	89.2
Race/Ethnicity (n=62)		
White	43	69.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	4.8
Bi- or Multi-racial	1	1.6
Black or African-American	15	24.2
Highest degree completed (n=64)		
High School	1	1.6
Associates	16	25.0
Bachelors	31	48.4
Masters	12	18.8
Doctorate	4	6.3
Sexual orientation (n=63)		
Bisexual	5	7.9
Gay or lesbian	8	12.7
Heterosexual or straight	45	71.5
Other	5	7.9
Location (n=67)		
Nevada	22	32.8
Connecticut	45	67.2

Table 4

Comparison between Connecticut (Yankeedom) and Nevada (Far West) pre-training

Demographic	Connecticut (n=45)	Nevada (n=22)
Age	M=33.81	M=36.68
Gender (% female)	68.2%	68.2%
Percentage Hispanic/Latino (n=65)	11.6%	9.1%
Race/Ethnicity (n=62)		
White	70.0%	68%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2.5%	9.1%
Bi- or Multi-racial	2.5%	0
Black or African-American	25.0%	23%
Highest degree completed (n=64)*		
High School	2.3%	0%
Associates	7.0%	13.0%
Bachelors	60.5%	23.8%
Masters	7.0%	4.8%
Doctorate	3.0%	1.0%
Sexual orientation (n=63)		
Bisexual	4.8%	14.3%
Gay or lesbian	9.5%	19.0%
Heterosexual or straight	78.0%	57.0%
Other	7.1%	9.5%
Voter registration	95.0%	100.0%
Party affiliation (% Democrat)	75.0%	73.0%
Fiscal ideology	M=0.53	M=0.77
Social ideology	M=0.19	M=0.45
Political efficacy before intervention*	M=19.9	M=18.5
Planned political activity pre-intervention	M=24.9	M=24.7

*=statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level

Table 5

Comparison between Connecticut(Yankeedom) and Nevada (Far West) post-training

	Connecticut	Nevada
Overall political efficacy	M=20.3	M=18.7
Planned political activity	M=26.0	M=26.6
Change in planned political activity from pre-test to post-test	M=1.6	M=2.7