Consider Yourself Asked: Introduction to Political Social Work

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S.R. Lane, S. Pritzker, *Political Social Work*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68588-5_1

Section 1: Overview

Political social work is social work practice that explicitly attends to power dynamics in policy-making and to political mechanisms for eliciting social change. Political social work includes expanding political participation, influencing policy agendas, working on campaigns or in electoral offices, and holding elected office. It is a form of practice, as well as related research and theory, through which social workers fulfill their ethical responsibility to engage in social and political action for social justice and human rights.

Social work has a long, rich history of courageous individuals and groups using power and the political system to promote social justice, equality, and self-determination. This book describes these highlights of our profession's history, as well as many missed opportunities, such as the experience of US social workers who chose not to act and therefore helped facilitate the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. You will meet trailblazing social workers like United States Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin, the first woman to be elected to a national representative body anywhere in the world. You will be introduced to the interrelationships between social work and political activity and the various ways that the guiding documents of the social work profession, including the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, encourage and guide political social work practice through the core values of the profession.

Developing Social Work Competency
The Council on Social Work Education establishes educational standards for all social work programs in the USA. Content in this chapter supports building competency in the following areas that are considered core to the practice of social work:
COMPETENCY 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior
COMPETENCY 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Section 2: Consider Yourself Asked

A leading framework for understanding political participation, discussed in depth later in this book, suggests that three key factors precede people's involvement in activities that influence politics and policy: knowing how and what to do (knowledge and skills), feeling like you want to—and are capable of—participating (interest and efficacy), and being asked or encouraged to participate. This book is specifically designed to help you build your political knowledge, skills, interest, and efficacy. However, we want to take this opportunity at the beginning of this book to directly *ask* you for your participation.

You may have spent your whole life interested in influencing policy, or you may be questioning why policy is relevant to a social work career. You may have always seen yourself with a rightful place in the political arena, or you may have been told throughout your life—either explicitly or implicitly—that politics is not the place for you. The authors of this book have worked with many students and social

workers who have been told directly by their parents, their friends, their community, or even the broader society that politics is not something they need to concern themselves with, that it is unimportant or someone else's domain. You may have heard some of these messages. As a woman, you may have been told by family members that politics and policy are a man's domain. As a person of color, you may have gotten the message that your voice is not needed or welcomed in political discussions. As a Millennial, you may have endured a constant refrain of negative media attention and headlines like one that appeared in *The Washington Post* in January 2016 stating "Why #Millennials don't matter much in American politics" (Bump 2016).

What we want to say to you is that *you do have a place in the world of politics and policy-making; your voice does belong*. As a person, as a social worker, as you, with all the experiences and identities you bring with you—you have a valuable voice to bring to policy-making, and we want to encourage you to use it. You came to social work because of a desire to help people, especially those who are vulnerable, marginalized, and often invisible to the larger society. These people need your direct assistance, but they also need you to help them and their concerns become visible in policy-making, as very few other people do. You, as a social worker who sees and understands the challenges that your clients face *and* who understands how larger structures contribute to these challenges, are exactly who our political arena needs. So, consider yourself asked to participate, to become a **political social worker**, a social worker who effectively navigates power dynamics and political strategies in order to bring about social justice and social change.

POLITICAL SOCIAL WORKER PROFILE: Barbara Mikulski, MSW
US Representative 1977–1987, US Senator 1987–2017 (D-MD) (Fig. 1.1).

Fig. 1.1 Barbara Mikulski, MSW

"Politics is social work with power." These words were spoken by a force within the political and social work world, Sen. Barbara Mikulski. She was the second woman (first female Democrat) to be elected to the US Senate, without replacing a deceased spouse, and in 2012 was elected to chair the powerful Senate Appropriations committee. The first woman to chair this committee, her position allowed her to oversee bills appropriating federal

(continued)

funds and to ensure that federal spending was consistent with values that reflected equity and equal opportunity. She is a self-proclaimed "social worker with power," someone whose grit and perseverance consistently met push-back from some colleagues as she defended spending on federal social welfare programs such as food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Weigel 2013). During her Senate career, she was widely regarded with respect and was tenacious in her pursuit of creating bipartisan solutions. Her intention was to focus solely on the best manner of appropriating funds, rather than feeding into partisan political games.

To hold such staunch beliefs and remain unwavering in the face of opposition requires unbelievable fortitude, especially in a male-dominated political arena. How did Sen. Mikulski supersede the onslaught of difficulties she faced in public office? How was she able to not only survive in the political world, but also thrive, all while maintaining her social work core? Growing up in a working-class family, completing her MSW, and engaging in coalition building as a community organizer grounded her political work. As a community organizer, she led the way for diverse populations to join together in protest to fight against highway building through their neighborhoods (Archives of Maryland n.d.).

Her community organizing led her to her first elected seat, on the Baltimore City Council. "I thought, 'Gee, why should I be out there knocking on doors trying to get inside?' Why not run for City Council and be inside, opening the doors for the people?" She led in a way that was seen as strong and direct, even amidst assumptions that as a woman and as a social worker, such approaches would be difficult to carry out. As Fisher and Johnson (2015) note, she blazed a trail for social workers and women in the political world, and chose to retire by posing the question "Do I spend my time raising money? Or do I spend my time raising hell?"

FURTHER REFLECTION: Barbara Mikulski and a Social Worker's Path to Politics
Watch the first 5 minutes of this interview on C-SPAN with former Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD): https://www.c-span.org/video/?10419-1/life-career-barbara-mikulski. What are your initial thoughts as you listen to her discuss her path to politics? What connections, if any, do you personally see between social work and politics?

Section 3: Why Political Social Work?

Social workers and those who laid the foundation for the social work profession have long navigated power dynamics, engaging with and challenging the political system to promote social justice, equality, and self-determination. Despite incredible changes in social work, in our communities, and in the world since the profession's inception, social work's call to improve society, advocate for social justice, and fight for

equality remains constant. The National Association of Social Workers' (2017) Code of Ethics requires social workers to "engage in social and political action" to "expand choice and opportunity" and "promote policies and practices that … safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people." Through its focus on influencing power and political dynamics, **political social work** practice is a central way in which social workers can meet these ethical obligations.

Above, you read about former Senator Barbara Mikulski's work and the impact she has had over her long political social work career. When she retired from the US Senate in 2016, she described herself as "a social worker with power" who wanted "to serve people with their day-to-day needs" (Fisher and Johnson 2015). Through her example, she shows us that social workers have social workers have both the capacity and perspectives necessary for navigating power dynamics on behalf of their clients and constituencies. Political social work practice provides a framework for social workers to effect change in the political process. Through political social work, we impact the contexts in which policies are made, thereby shaping the content of these policies. We are guided by our professional values and ethics to change the voices represented in policy-making and to shape how issues and policies are framed.

The skill discussions in this book are designed to prepare readers to engage in political social work at all levels of practice, including leadership roles within a social work career. This book is designed to help social workers develop the skills necessary for all stages of political social work including assessing the political environment, engaging with social workers and nonsocial workers around political issues, implementing successful advocacy and electoral campaigns, and evaluating practice in the political arena.

Section 4: What Does Political Social Work Look Like?

"Political social work" emerged as a term in the early 1990s, calling the profession's attention to the importance of training social workers to effectively navigate power and political dynamics to further social change. Two discrete definitions were promoted in the term's early years. Nancy A. Humphreys, founder of the University of Connecticut Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work, defined political social work as a subset of macro-focused policy practice, through which specialist social workers work full time in political arenas (NASW 2003). Political social work was instead defined as part of social work across all practice methods by Robert Fisher (1995) and his University of Houston colleagues. Through this view, all social work is political, requiring engaging with power and politics.

Contemporary political social work includes social work practice, research, and theory construction that explicitly attends to power dynamics in policy-making and political mechanisms used for eliciting social change. Political social work requires social workers to understand political strategies and to be skilled in implementing these strategies in all levels of systems. Political social workers must also be able to communicate political and policy information to the clients and client systems they work with in order to create opportunities for empowerment. Through political social work practice, social work values and ethics can be injected into

policy-making. Ultimately, political social workers accomplish this by contributing to political leadership, leading change movements, and empowering clients to choose to leverage their political voices.

What Are Political Social Work Strategies?

We identify five domains in which political social work commonly takes place. Social workers may practice in each of these domains as full-time political social work practitioners or as complementary to their practice in clinical, community, or administrative settings. We use this five-domain framework throughout the book to guide discussion of the various ways in which social workers can pursue social change through political means.

Domains of Political Social Work	
1. Engaging individuals and communities in political processes	◀
2. Influencing policy agendas and decision-making	◀
3. Holding professional and political positions	◀
4. Engaging with electoral campaigns	◀
5. Seeking and holding elected office	◀

Within each of these five domains, social workers can use specific strategies to effect change in each of these domains. These specific strategies include the following:

Domain 1: Engaging individuals and communities in political processes

- Performing outreach to increase voting on the part of underrepresented groups
- Educating underrepresented groups to increase political awareness and engagement
- Registering eligible members of client systems to vote
- Advocating for expanded political power to underrepresented groups, including increased voting rights and more just and responsive electoral processes

Domain 2: Influencing policy agendas and decision-making

- Influencing the policy agendas of candidates
- Influencing policy agendas and policy decision-making by elected officials
- Influencing policy agendas and policy decision-making by government agencies

Domain 3: Holding professional and political staff positions

- Working on policy through civil service or other professional positions
- Serving as political appointees in a range of government offices
- Working in the offices of elected officials

Domain 4: Engaging with electoral campaigns

- Working on campaigns as a volunteer or paid staff
- Seeking passage or defeat of ballot initiatives or referenda
- Educating voters about policy issues that are part of candidate or issue campaigns
- Influencing which candidates run for elected office

Domain 5: Seeking and holding elected office

- Running for elected office
- Serving in elected office

In What Settings Do Political Social Workers Practice?

To advance the profession of social work, address the many challenges society faces, and ensure that social work's values and principles help guide our policy process, all social workers, regardless of field of practice or method, require core political knowledge and skills. As Reisch (2000) argues, the social work profession needs both social workers who can lead political efforts *and* a larger group who engage in political action "with purpose, conviction, perseverance, and even with relish" (p. 293).

While *all* social workers can and should engage in political practice to fulfill our ethical mandate, political knowledge and skills are consistently used and advanced by full-time macro-oriented political social workers, whom we refer to as **specialists**. These social workers hold jobs that require continual interaction with political and policy processes. They call upon these skills to provide leadership to their organizations, communities, and profession. Specialist political social workers practice in a wide range of politically oriented settings. As we describe in more depth throughout this book, these settings include advocacy or lobbying organizations, political action committees, grassroots community organizations, political campaigns, offices of local, state, or national elected officials, and in elected positions.

A wider group of social workers are what we refer to as **generalists**, those who integrate political work into broader social work practice. These social workers may not engage with the political process on a daily basis, but they understand policy-making and political process and they engage that system and its specialists when needed in order to create change for their clients, communities, or agencies. Generalist social workers work or volunteer in many of the same settings as specialist social workers. They volunteer for political campaigns, influence political party agendas, and attend political fundraisers. Within their fields of practice, generalist social workers empower their clients to leverage their own political voices, implement voter registration drives, and build community coalitions that engage politicians around issues, candidates, and political processes.

Because political social work requires explicit attention to power and political dynamics inherent in the policy process, these two groups of social workers must work together to ensure that the experiences and needs of clients and communities are represented within the political process and resulting policies. The expertise of each social work group's complements the expertise of the other. Specialists may have a deeper understanding of the process, players, and mechanisms of change, while generalists may have a deeper understanding of the needs of particular populations. Both sets of social workers can use core social work skills to help craft policy. For example, social workers who develop strong political relationships are able to bring their expertise to policy-makers both as consultants behind the scenes and by testifying or providing public comments throughout the policy process. While all social workers may engage in these types of advocacy efforts, social workers who consistently focus on the importance of human relationships in their political social work practice will be well situated to impact policy outcomes.

Section 5: History of Political Social Work

A review of social work's "grand accomplishments" reveals that social workers have played important roles throughout history in eliciting fundamental societal change through governmental institutions, including—at crucial times—through political leadership (AASWSW 2013). Involvement by social workers in politics began in a small but significant way in the profession's early years (Mahaffey 1987). In 1896, James B. Reynolds wrote the first known article urging social workers to go into politics. He also analyzed the political process as it related to neighborhood residents' problems.

As the profession began to develop, social workers focused on causes. Gradually, social work began to develop an emphasis on the interrelationship between individuals and their environment. Social workers began to articulate the value that all people are entitled to the resources necessary to meet their basic human needs and achieve their maximum potential in a democratic society (Mahaffey 1987). Early social workers involved in activism included Lillian Wald, Florence Kelly, Paul Kellogg, and most famously Jane Addams (Huff n.d.). Many of these early activists came out of the settlement house movement (Davis 1964a). These social workers argued that money spent properly on social reform would end poverty and social conflict. They advocated for higher wages, shorter working hours, better working conditions, a minimum wage, ending child labor, universal pensions, and unions.

At the same time, a second perspective within social work held that an impartial approach to the political world, clean and above the fray, was necessary for social work to obtain and maintain a professional status (Mahaffey 1987). Those with this perspective raised concerns about social workers' involvement in political activity. They were apprehensive that social workers who became involved in politics would risk the unbiased image of the new profession. Their view of the role of social workers was that members of the profession should make their expertise available for

legislators working on social policy, but should not be involved firsthand in making political decisions. Social workers holding this view, such as Edward Devine, worked to inform legislators and helped create new social policy organizations, but strongly believed that nonpartisanship was crucial for professionalism. Under this perspective, social workers should supply information to be used for public policy, but go no further (Mahaffey and Hanks 1982).

A third perspective was exemplified by caseworkers such as Mary Richmond, who thought that poverty was rooted in individual and moral failings (Mahaffey 1987). Richmond stated that social workers should focus on helping people on a case-by-case basis, rather than focusing on social legislation. Richmond and others with this viewpoint argued that reform movements did not represent genuine social work. They maintained that when a social worker engaged in political activities, such as being elected to office, that person was leaving the field of social work. They were concerned that political efforts would divert attention and resources from practice (Mahaffey and Hanks 1982).

This conflict between social workers' involvement in policy-level change and microlevel practice was underscored when Miriam Van Waters spoke out against the involvement of social workers in politics in a 1930 speech to the National Conference of Social Welfare (Mahaffey 1987), and has remained a long-standing challenge within the profession. As president of the organization, Van Waters maintained that concentrating on legislative and constitutional reform would result in a neglect of the concept of personality and individual responsibility, thus concluding that reform movements did not represent genuine social work. However, her contemporary, Francis McLean, a leader in family social work, disagreed. McLean countered that good casework demanded caseworkers be active in working for the development of a more sensible economic system. Along these lines, the American Association of Social Workers (AASW) proposed a "radical program" in 1933 that stressed the importance of redistribution of wealth and power through reconstruction of socio-economic institutions. The organization endorsed a permanent government welfare system and praised other New Deal programs.

Such rifts in the profession occasionally brought about consequences for those social workers whom it judged to have crossed a line in regard to political action. Bertha Capen Reynolds' social views, including her support for unions and for Marxism, found her blacklisted during and after World War II (Leighninger 1999). Addams and Wald were both ostracized by many for their activism, particularly for activities such as those related to unions and peace causes, which were seen by some as radical (Mahaffey 1987).

Efforts by social work organizations to engage social workers in political activity began to grow in the latter half of the twentieth century. When the NASW Code of Ethics was adopted in 1960, it specifically established that responsibility to the community and broader society is a professional obligation for social workers. In 1979, NASW took an even stronger stance on behalf of political action, introducing specific responsibilities to society, including a responsibility to advocate for policy change. In 1996, NASW went even further, adding an explicit call to *all* social

workers "to engage in social and political action" that remains in place today (NASW n.d.).

Involvement of professional social work organizations in politics was first formalized in the 1970s when the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) began to lobby and influence partisan elections on the state and federal level (Dempsey 2003). At the national and state levels, Education Legislative Action Network (ELAN) committees were developed for social workers to learn about legislation, disseminate related information to chapter members, and influence policy (Alexander 1982). As early as 1981, political activity figured prominently in the social work literature, with the profession's premier journal, *Social Work*, devoting the editorial page and five articles to social workers' political activity. It was determined on the floor of the NASW Delegate Assembly in 1993 that the profession should strengthen its focus on political action (Dr. Nancy A. Humphreys, personal communication, January 15, 2007).

In 1945, Pray argued that social workers should limit political action to work needed to help an agency function (Alexander 1982). While opposition to social workers' political activity is weaker today, the debate has not entirely concluded. Writing from Israel, Shamai and Boehm (2001) suggest that politically oriented social work intervention may be possible for many social workers, but caution against allowing an unprofessional "political debate" into the process. Despite these concerns, social workers and social work organizations have increasingly embraced and furthered the expansion of social workers' political engagement.

The following section highlights the history of political social work within each of the domains previously described in Section 4 of this chapter.

History: Engaging Individuals and Communities in Political Processes (Domain 1)

Social work historically has sought to expand political power among populations traditionally underrepresented. In fact, this is codified in the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics, with the call for social workers to enhance "meaningful participation in decision making for all people." Two critical mechanisms for doing this are voter registration and voter education. One of the largest innovations in expanding voter registration in the USA was led by social worker Richard Cloward, profiled in Chap. 8. Cloward cofounded a national coalition, Human SERVE (Service Employees Registration and Voter Education), to expand **suffrage**, the right to vote. Among the accomplishments of this coalition were voter registration drives organized across the USA and their work toward passage of the federal National Voter Registration Act in 1993. This coalition's advocacy resulted in the development of federal and state motor-voter programs in order to increase the accessibility of voter registration (Piven and Minnite 2013).

Efforts to integrate voter engagement into social work education emerged in the early twenty-first century. Innovative programs at the University of Connecticut and

the University of Nevada Reno involve social work students registering voters at their field placements. Two policy-focused social work organizations, Influencing Social Policy (ISP) and the Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy (CRISP), joined together in advance of the 2016 Presidential Election to sponsor a nonpartisan Voter Empowerment Campaign (Lewis 2015). This national campaign developed and disseminated social work-specific tools designed to facilitate voter registration and education.

History: Influencing Policy Agendas and Decision-Making (Domain 2)

From social work's earliest years, practitioners have influenced the policy agendas of both candidates and elected officials. Many social workers, including Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and Mary Church Terrell, actively sought to expand women's right to vote by influencing elected officials to put this on their agendas and move it through the policy process. Jane Addams and Jeanette Rankin sought to influence policies surrounding war and peace through their participation in early-twentieth-century peace movements.

NASW has been active in lobbying and influencing the decision-making of elected officials on the state and federal levels since the 1970s. Their involvement began with development of Education Legislative Action Network (ELAN) committees (Alexander 1982). Then and now, these ELAN committees attached to state NASW chapters and at the federal level educate policy-makers about issues key to social work and the communities we serve, and ensure that those issues stay on the legislative agenda. Social workers also have sought to influence local policy, from Jane Addams' early days seeking to change garbage collection in Chicago to the present day. Social workers in Houston, Texas, showed leadership regarding expanding rights for the LGBTQ community in Houston by joining in a community effort to advocate for an ordinance to expand nondiscrimination protections (Guerra 2015). This effort is discussed in more detail in Chap. 9's profile of Melanie Pang.

History: Holding Professional and Political Staff Positions (Domain 3)

Social workers serve in both professional and political staff positions. One category of political appointees are those employees who are appointed to their positions by chief executives (presidents, vice presidents, governors, or other appointees). Social worker Frances Perkins was the first woman ever appointed by a President to his cabinet. Perkins served as President Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor from 1933 to 1945. In this position, she was actively involved in developing the Social Security Act. Social workers Harry Hopkins and John Collier also were appointed to federal leadership posts by Roosevelt. During the Depression, Hopkins led federal work relief programs including the Federal Emergency Relief Administration

and the Works Progress Administration. As Commissioner for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Collier designed the "Indian New Deal" (AASWSW 2013). Another significant social worker and political appointee was Wilbur Cohen, appointed by President Lyndon Johnson as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to guide the passage of Medicare. In a more recent example, Jared Bernstein was appointed by Vice President Joseph Biden as his Chief Economist and Economic Adviser under President Barack Obama.

Local, state, and federal legislators also hire staff who typically share their political orientations. Social worker Gabe Zimmerman served as the community outreach director for former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. In this role, he organized the outreach event at which he lost his life, when a gunman targeted Giffords (NASW 2011). Working for legislators is a setting in which some students begin their political social work careers. For example, the University of Houston runs a legislative internship program; through this program, students participate in a full-time block placement as legislative staffers during Texas' biennial legislative session. After graduation, some of these social work interns come back to the legislature to hold positions such as chief of staff or legislative director.

Social workers also work in professional positions as **civil servants**, employees hired through merit-based procedures separate from the political system. Social workers may be employed in executive branch agencies. They also may work for the legislature as part of nonpartisan offices, such as the federal Congressional Budget Office.

History: Engaging with Electoral Campaigns (Domain 4)

In the early years of the twentieth century, social workers, often direct practitioners, played an active role in electoral politics. As early as 1901, social worker and public health nurse Lillian Wald supported the New York City mayoral campaign of Seth Low. When Mayor Low was elected, he honored his campaign promise to Wald to increase the number of public health nurses in the city.

Jane Addams and other social workers sought to "apply the principles and techniques of social work and research to the organization of a political party" (Davis 1964b). They developed a National Progressive Service and engaged in developing a political platform and voter education. This work supported the Progressive Party. They served on its executive boards, and took on roles as active campaigners, voter registrars, and delegates to the party's 1912 convention. Following Roosevelt's decision to run on the Progressive Party third-party ticket in 1912, Addams seconded his nomination for president at that year's Progressive Party convention, the first time in US history that a woman presented a nominating or seconding speech at a party's national convention (Dempsey 2003; Leighninger 2004).

Social work organizations became involved in endorsing and donating to candidates in the second half of the twenty-first century. NASW formed the PACE (Political Action for Candidate Election) committee as a national political action committee (PAC), and it was authorized by the 1976 Delegate Assembly (Dempsey

1999). PACE endorses and contributes to federal candidates, mobilizes NASW members to vote for endorsed candidates, hires field organizers to increase voter turnout in targeted races, compiles voting records for elected officials, and maintains information on social workers who currently hold political office at all levels. With parallel purposes, the first state PACE committee was formed in Florida in 1978 (Mathews 1983). Development of other state PACE committees followed in subsequent years. Notably, less than one-third of state PACE committees endorse candidates in local elections (Scanlon et al. 2006). Through its annual Campaign School, the Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work prepares social work students to volunteer for and lead electoral campaigns (Ostrander et al. 2017). We also continue to see social workers' involvement in issue-based electoral campaigns. For example, following the efforts mentioned above to strengthen Houston's nondiscrimination protections, social workers became actively involved in efforts to pass an Equal Rights Ordinance referendum placed on the city's ballot (Guerra 2015).

History: Seeking and Holding Elected Office (Domain 5)

Social worker Jeannette Rankin was the first woman in the USA elected to Congress in 1916, and was elected again in 1940. In 1971, Ron Dellums became the second social worker elected to the US House of Representatives. Dellums was known for his peace activities, his radicalism, founding the Congressional Black Caucus, and serving on the Armed Services Committee (Dellums and Halterman 2000). When Dellums retired in 1998, his chief of staff, Barbara Lee, also a social worker, replaced him. During the 1970s, at a time when the profession was becoming more politically active, the number of social workers in Congress doubled with the election of Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) in 1976 (Mikulski et al. 2000). Mikulski retired in 2016 as the most senior female in the US Senate (Davis 1964b).

In 1979, 51 social workers holding elected state legislative offices in the USA were identified (Mahaffey 1987). In 2007, the National Association of Social Workers had information about 10 social workers serving in the federal legislature and 192 in state and local offices (Lane and Humphreys 2011). As of 2008, Lane and Humphreys (2011) had identified 467 social workers who had run for elective office. Nine social workers held office during the 115th Congress (January 2017–January 2019): one in the Senate (Sen. Debbie Stabenow from Michigan) and eight in the House of Representatives (Personal communication, D. Kastner, January 3, 2017). Social workers also serve as elected officials at the state level, and most commonly in local government positions, as elected members of commissions, councils, and boards. Holding municipal office is a strong fit for social workers who can use political strategies to address the basic needs of local communities (Rose 1999). Social workers can receive social work-specific training for running for office. The Humphreys Institute Campaign School mentioned above has included training on running for elected office for over 20 years; more recently, CRISP has offered a Political Boot Camp.

POLITICAL SOCIAL WORKER PROFILE: Jeanette Rankin
US Representative 1917–1919; 1941–1943

Jeanette Rankin was a pioneer in political social work. She began her social work career doing casework with orphans in a group facility in Spokane, Washington. She soon became discouraged with casework. She was frustrated with hoping for benefits to be distributed to people in need, and decided that it would be better to educate and motivate the public. She joined the successful women's suffrage campaign in Washington state and then continued to work as part of successful women's suffrage efforts in California, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Montana (Davidson 1994; Josephson 1974).

On November 6, 1916, Rankin was able to vote in Montana for the first time in her life. She voted in this election—for herself. She was the first woman to run for the US Congress. With her victory, Rankin became the first woman elected to Congress and, in fact, to any national representative body in the world.

Once in the US House, she was one of only a few votes against the US entrance into World War I. She is often remembered for this vote, an example of where social work and peace movements intersected in the profession's early years (Simon 2002). In office, she fought for economic justice, women's rights, civil rights, and election reform, and was a sponsor of the first mother-and-child health bill proposed to Congress (Josephson 1974). After one term, she lost her bid for election to the Senate, and spent the next two decades as a lobbyist.

On November 5, 1940, Rankin was once again elected to the US House of Representatives from Montana. Once again, she had the opportunity to vote against US entry into a war. After Pearl Harbor, she stood alone as the only member of Congress to vote against US entry into World War II (Josephson 1974). After two separate terms in office and two separate votes against entry into a world war, Rankin chose not to run for election.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Social Work and Politics
Answer the following questions created by Rome and Hoechstetter (2010). Check the box in the first column if you plan to do this in the future, and the box in the second column if you think social workers should do this action. Tally your answers for each column. Discuss your answers with a fellow social worker.

Activity	I ***plan*** to do this in the future	Social workers ***should*** do this
Vote in federal elections	☐	☐
Work for pay on campaigns for candidates of my choice	☐	☐
Encourage others to vote on election day	☐	☐
Share my political opinions with others	☐	☐
Take an active role in relation to issues that affect me personally	☐	☐

(continued)

Activity	I *plan* to do this in the future	Social workers *should* do this
Vote in state elections	☐	☐
Read, listen to, or watch the news	☐	☐
Refuse to vote to demonstrate dissatisfaction with certain elements of the political system	☐	☐
Volunteer for political campaigns	☐	☐
Donate money to causes that are important to me	☐	☐
Follow the progress of legislation that interests me	☐	☐
Volunteer with interest groups (NASW, EMILY's List, NRA), civic organizations (local nonprofit, community group), or a political party (Republican, Democrat)	☐	☐
Keep track of how my legislators vote on issues that interest me	☐	☐
Participate in political rallies, marches, protests, etc.	☐	☐
Voice my opinion on policy issues to media markets (radio, newspapers, TV, etc.)	☐	☐
Take an active role in relation to issues that affect my clients	☐	☐
Participate in civil disobedience when unjust laws or policies are enacted	☐	☐
Contact elected officials about issues that affect my clients	☐	☐
Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs) to organize and engage in politics	☐	☐
Write/deliver testimony to elected and/or appointed political bodies	☐	☐
Vote in local elections	☐	☐
Donate money to political campaigns and/or parties	☐	☐
Discuss current policy issues with others	☐	☐
Take part in concerts or supporting events that are associated with a cause (such as "Race for a Cure") and raise awareness and donations	☐	☐
Choose to spend my money on products, organizations, or businesses that support my personal beliefs	☐	☐
Contact my local elected official(s) about issues that concern me	☐	☐
Contact my state elected official(s) about issues that concern me	☐	☐
Contact my federal elected official(s) about issues that concern me	☐	☐
Encourage and/or help others register to vote	☐	☐
Been appointed/seek appointment to a political position or government office (i.e., local commission, government board)?	☐	☐
Run for local office	☐	☐
Run for state office	☐	☐
Run for federal office	☐	☐
Total (0–33)		

Section 6: The Importance of Political Social Work in Social Work Ethics and Values

Since 1996, the Code of Ethics has explicitly required *all* social workers "to engage in social and political action" (NASW n.d.). It does not stop with that statement, however. It calls on social workers to specifically "expand choice and opportunity" and "promote policies and practices that … safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people" (6.04) (NASW 2017). Such statements clearly underscore the ethical obligation of social workers to promote social justice and further social change.

Political social work practice is an essential component to promoting social justice. If social workers want to influence the content of policies that impact vulnerable and oppressed populations, we also must influence *who* possesses the power to make policy decisions. By engaging in political social work practice, we can skillfully navigate the power and political dynamics inherent in political processes in order to be impactful.

Through political social work, we also can expand representation in politics from both social workers and vulnerable populations with whom we work. Research finds that when policy-making bodies are representative of diverse gender, racial, or ethnic communities, policy priorities differ from the status quo. For example, elected bodies that include women place greater emphasis on education, medical issues, and human welfare than do other policy-making bodies (Thomas 1994; Smith 2013). A similar dynamic takes place when legislative bodies include representation from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds (Kittilson and Tate 2005). Evidence suggests that the composition of policy-making bodies also impacts the language used to frame policy issues. For example, when women are part of policy-making, they are more likely to discuss reproductive rights through the lens of women's health than of morality (Levy et al. 2001).

We want to emphasize that the discussion of political action in the Code of Ethics is not limited to how social workers participate. The Code also emphasizes political empowerment, calling on social workers to promote meaningful and informed public participation in policy decision-making. Throughout this book, we discuss political social work strategies that can be used in engaging social work clients and constituencies in political processes.

Section 7: What Will Readers Be Able to Do at the End of this Book?

By the end of this text, readers will be able to accomplish the following:

- Identify the diverse array of political social work career opportunities
- Increase self-awareness of personal ideology, knowledge, skills, and efficacy
- Describe political social work theories, models, and legal issues
- Identify power, ways to assess it, and ways to engage with it productively
- Apply social work assessment skills in political contexts
- Design effective strategies for electoral and advocacy campaigns

- Use critical thinking skills to identify campaign targets and effective ways to reach them
- Identify key strategies for empowering communities through voter engagement
- Demonstrate persuasive political communication skills, including interpersonal communication, framing, and effective use of language
- Develop skills for hiring and managing volunteers and staff members in political settings
- Understand rules and concepts of raising money on political efforts
- Understand rules and concepts of spending money on political efforts
- Learn how to monitor and evaluate success within a political context
- Develop skills in evaluating and navigating ethical dilemmas in the context of political practice
- Create an individualized roadmap for a political social work career, as a generalist or specialist
- Increase the social work profession's presence and power in the political arena

FURTHER REFLECTION: US Social Workers and the Internment of Japanese-Americans During World War II

Read the article "Facilitating Injustice: Tracing the Role of Social Workers in the World War II Internment of Japanese Americans" by Yoosun Park (2008). What actions by social workers in this situation would have honored the value of social justice? What political skills might have been useful in taking those actions?

The article can be accessed either though a university or college online library database, or you may read it online for free by going to this link and creating a free "MyJSTOR" account: http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1086/592361.pdf.

Review of Key Terms and Concepts

Civil servants: government employees vetted through merit-based procedures designed to be separate from the political system.

Generalists: a wider group of social workers compared to specialists (see below), who integrate political work into broader social work practice. These social workers may not engage with the political process on a daily basis, but they understand policy-making and political process, and they engage that system and its specialists when needed in order to create change for their clients, communities, or agencies.

Political social work: social work practice that explicitly attends to power dynamics in policy-making and to political mechanisms for eliciting social change.

Political social worker: a social worker who effectively navigates power dynamics and political strategies in order to bring about social justice and social change.

Specialists: full-time macro-oriented political social workers who are in jobs that require continual interaction with the political or policy process and call upon these skills to provide leadership to their organizations, communities, and profession.

Suffrage: the right to vote.

Resources

Article

Rome, S. H., & Hoechstetter, S. (2010). Social work and civic engagement: The political participation of professional social workers. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 37*, 107–129.

Websites

Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy (CRISP): http://www.crispinc.org
Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work, University of Connecticut: http://www.politicalinstitute.uconn.edu
University of Houston, Austin Legislative Internship Program: http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/academics/msw/specializations/political-specializations/austin-legislative-internship/index.php

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