

American Politics: A Local Government Analysis of How Gender Influences the Decision to Run for Office

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Abstract: How does gender affect the decision to run for local office? This article explains how the socialization of traditional gender roles influenced a public perception where men are more qualified for political positions than women, and how in turn, the public-perception influenced a negative self-perception where women feel less qualified to run for office. In addition to those factors, this article explains how political party, professional career and recruitment opportunities pose challenges for women where they pose fewer to no challenges for men. Identifying these factors is necessary in order for women to one day achieve representation proportional to their population. The survey conducted in this research on local town and city council governments throughout New York State, seeks to uncover how all of those factors influenced the decision to run for local office.

Key Words: Political Science, Politics, Local Government, Representation, Underrepresentation, Proportional Representation, Male, Female, Gender Gap, Political Ambition, Traditional Gender Roles, Public Perception, Self-Perception, Political Party, Recruitment, Eligibility Pool, Survey, Respondents, Town and City Councils, Legislators

Proportional representation for women is extremely important because policies made in the best interests of women are often made by women. Increasing the number of women in office is necessary to achieve that proportional representation, where the number of women in office accurately reflects the number of women in the population. People of different genders, races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and more, should have their interests accurately represented by policy makers. My research attempts to understand issues relevant to the gender gap in political ambition by asking the question, how does gender influence the decision to run for local office? The survey conducted in my research sheds light on the differences in the decision-making process to run for office between men and women. It will also provide first hand experiences that legislators have endured throughout that process and challenges that they have faced once elected to office. Ultimately, women are disadvantaged in the political environment, and face societal barriers that men do not have to face, and that is why they are continually underrepresented.

The public perceives women and men differently, typically perceiving men as more qualified to hold leadership positions, especially in a political setting. As a result of this public perception, women tend to have a lower level of political ambition than men do. In addition to public perception, women have less confident self-perceptions, believing that they do not belong as much as men believe they do (Lawless and Fox, 2012). Changing the public perception that politics are dominated by men requires increasing the number of women in politics, to encourage other women that they too can hold those positions (Cormack 2016). Traditional gender roles also influence the number of women in office because women have to be more considerate of household tasks and child care (Lawless and Fox 2012). The number of women running for office is lower than the number of men, which reflects the notion that politics are largely run by

men. Access to healthcare resources contributes to a women's pursuit of higher education and career, more specifically with deliberate family planning and contraceptives (Onarheim, Husøy and Bloom 2016). As a result of higher education and pursuing professional careers, more women will be in the eligibility pool of possible people who can hold office (Lawless, Fox and Feeley 2001). The recruitment of more women in office can influence a change in the composition of gendered donor networks and more women will be encouraged to run for office and have the means to do so. The result here would be greater political ambition, which in turn, will increase female representation in politics where they hold positions of leadership. Greater female representation would ideally contribute to policy implementation in the best interests of women. Identifying the reasons behind the lack of female political ambition compared to male political ambition is important in the attempt to increase the number of women in office.

I. Literature Review

There are many reasons as to why women are underrepresented in politics, throughout history and still to this day. While significant strides have been made to achieve gender equality or to increase the number of women in office, the gender gap still persists due to the underlying factors. Efforts must be made to motivate women to run for office to achieve that representation. Recruitment from political parties and PACs, or support from professional colleagues are helpful methods. Implementation of gender quotas that save seats for women to be elected is also a step toward overcoming the gender gap. According to Fox and Lawless, traditional gender roles where women are responsible for household tasks and child care are not significant political ambition predictors like people may believe due to historic reasons (2014, 398). People may believe this because women were traditionally left home to take care of children while the men would go out and work. Today, however, that narrative is less and less significant as working

women become the norm. While family roles do not prevent women from running as a candidate, family roles do still pose difficulties and contribute to making a career choice (Fox and Lawless 2014, 401). Although it currently appears that times are changing due to social movements like the Women's March or the number of women elected to Congress in the November 2018 election, trends following the rise of women have also historically been followed by plateaus. For example, there was a surge of women seeking elected office in the 1990s, followed by a plateau, which was then followed by a decrease in the 2010 congressional elections (Lawless and Fox 2012, 1). Therefore, it is too soon to tell if this is a new beginning where women hold office increasingly proportional to that of their population, or if this is just a short-term trend.

To understand the lack of representation of women in U.S. politics, it is helpful to examine the representation of women in politics around the world. According to Lawless and Fox's 2012 data, the U.S. was surpassed by ninety nations in the percentage of women they had in the national legislature. This clearly raises attention to the democratic legitimacy in America. Following along with those statistics, more than fifty democratic countries also surpassed the U.S. in women's representation, according to a worldwide ranking system (1-2). A reason for this could be the implementation of gender quotas around the world, that more than half of countries today use (Jabeen and Awan 2017, 135). The problem is not necessarily women's performance in office compared to a man's, once in office, because they do just as well. The problem lies within running for office itself, which is where women have less resources and support and more barriers (Lawless and Fox 2012, 2). The countries with the most female representation to least female representation are Nordic, then the Americas, and at the bottom lie Arab states and the Pacific region (Jabeen and Awan 2017, 140). This could be a result of the

quota systems present in countries with more female representation than the U.S., that either somewhat force women to be represented or reserve seats for women in the legislature. Quotas provide women with an incentive to run and know that success is possible, whereas, without them, it may not be. The U.S. does not implement gender quotas, and therefore, we must still seek to increase the number of women in office by identifying why there is a gender gap and creating solutions to change that.

The role of women in families and households has influenced the gender gap in the past, but today it does not have as significant effects as it once did. There is a mixture of data in regard to how much of an affect those roles have on the female decision-making process to run for office. Data from 2001 to 2011 revealed that women were more likely than men to be responsible for household work and childcare, and those results held up over that ten-year time frame (Lawless and Fox 2012, 13). Further Fox and Lawless research from 2014, however, revealed that family arrangements did not prevent women from making the initial decision to run for office (2014, 401). This difference in results could be attributed to the idea that the women who do choose to become top-level professionals, choose not to get married and have children, therefore, it is not a factor in their decision to run for office (Lawless and Fox 2012, 14). The data presented by Onarheim, Husøy and Bloom revealed that women are more likely to pursue higher education and professional careers, dependent on the availability of healthcare and contraceptives (2016, 7). Development of society is largely dependent on providing women with “deliberate family planning” and when women’s health issues are prioritized, the population health will be better, and society will be productive long term (Onarheim, Husøy and Bloom 2016, 1-2). Providing healthcare services to women is a contribution to the economic success of a country and another study in the Onarheim et al. research revealed that there are more college graduates and less

single parents upon greater access to abortion in the U.S (Onarheim, Husøy and Bloom 2016, 7). If the provision of women's healthcare services increases the likelihood that they will attend college and pursue professional careers, then that adds more women to the eligibility pool of females who can run for office. The more professionally qualified women there are, the likelihood of recruitment increases and in turn, the number of women in office will increase.

Political ambition is defined as the desire to run for office, therefore my research seeks to understand what factors encouraged or discouraged individuals to run for office. This desire can be diminished due to traditional gender roles that suggest men belong in leadership positions and women do not. The social eligibility pool is significant to consider here (Fox, Lawless, and Feely 2001, 412). This pool of people refers to the most eligible people, based on their professional careers, to run for office, consider running for office or be suggested to run for office by others. Fox, Lawless and Feely identified the most common professions like, lawyers, business executives, and educators, of people in the House of Representatives or other political settings (2001, 416). Perhaps the reason why women do not run for office at the same rates as men is because they were traditionally excluded from those occupations. Occupation affects the number of potential people in the eligibility pool. The eligibility pool of women differs by state, due to differing professional positions working women hold. Sanbonmatsu explains that political parties are similar to a membership in two different social groups providing different types of careers, which create the differing eligibility pools between parties. Political party also affects recruitment opportunities, due to the gender composition of the parties, who prioritizes the election of women, and how the party influences the nominations (2002, 797).

Without considering political party, women are already less likely than men to receive the suggestion that they should run for office, from anyone. A 2011 study done by Lawless and Fox

revealed that men were ten percent more likely than women to receive suggestions that they run for office from a political actor, and seven percent more likely from a non-political actor (Lawless and Fox 2012, 13). Once political party is taken into consideration, the Democratic Party is more likely to prioritize the recruitment of women than the Republican Party. One reason for this is the mobilization of women's organizations from female Democrats (Sanbonmatsu 2002, 805-6). Lawless, Fox, and Sanbonmatsu are getting at a similar point in which the movement for gender equality differs between political parties. This can also be attributed to the gendered composition of donor networks within each political party. Female Democrats prioritize the election of women over gaining more seats for their party, whereas women's issues are not central goals of Republican women, and when they are, the policies pursued are often more conservative. Democratic women have liberal views on policy and one of their goals is to advance women's rights. Republican women tend to prioritize ideology like Republican men do. This prioritization of different issues affects the composition of donor networks, which are necessary to campaigning for office (Thomsen and Swers 2017, 460). The donor networks within the Democratic party have a high level of gender affinity, where male donors contribute more to male candidates and female donors contribute more to female candidates (Thomsen and Swers 2017, 455).

The Democratic and Republican parties have differing agendas in terms of how they prioritize the election of women in office. Democrats often have higher levels of female representation because of the female legislators in the Democratic party. Suggestions to run for office and being recruited are aligned with one another. Further research that theorizes the difference in political party recruitment, reveals that women in the Democratic party are more committed to recruiting women than women in the Republican party. Elder makes similar points

to the Lawless, Fox, and Sanbonmatsu theories in which political party can affect which gender dominates office. Democratic women have a greater chance of achieving representation than Republican women (Elder 2014, 21). Although parties are not necessarily biased against female candidates, they are simply not as encouraged as male candidates to run for office, or as often recruited. Therefore, measures must be taken to actively try to get women in office. Due to the fact that national party committees raise record amounts of money, setting a portion of that money aside to recruit and support female candidates is a plausible method to increase female representation. Parties may work with non-Super PACs to increase support and communication between political parties and those groups (Elder 2014, 21). A separate study done revealed that, on average, women's PACS won eighty-eight percent of their primaries, which is an accomplishment regardless of these PACs having a larger focus on incumbent women versus a focus on challenger female candidates (Mitchell 2011, 12). The recruitment strategies, training programs, and direct funding of political organizations are key elements to a successful campaign.

With looking into recruitment of candidates for office, it is helpful to understand how the recruitment process works. First, one must apply for candidacy, second, be approved by the party, third, be selected as a candidate, and last, be elected to the legislature (Ashe and Stewart 2012, 688). Advancers move on throughout each stage of the process, while non-advancers do not progress. Some theories suggest underrepresentation occurs because particular social groups do not have enough members coming forward to participate in the recruitment process, while some theories suggest that underrepresentation occurs due to certain social groups being discriminated against by gatekeepers (Ashe and Stewart 2012, 689). Scholars attribute underrepresentation to both of these occurrences, the first of which is called the supply side and

the latter of which is referred to as the demand side (Ashe and Stewart 2012, 690). While the case study here is particular to Canada, it helps to evaluate underrepresentation in areas outside of Canada (Ashe and Stewart 2012, 703). It also refers to the works of Lawless and Fox, who investigate the supply side of underrepresentation, which aligns with their research as to why women do not run for office, because of the lack of members coming forward to participate. The recruitment process provides candidates that encouragement they need to run, and more specifically, female candidates.

Along with recruitment, public perception and self-perception have influenced the political environment. Women not only feel less qualified to run for office, but potential female candidates are less competitive and less confident than their male counterparts. Women are twenty-five percent less likely to believe that they possess the political qualities, like confidence and level of competitiveness, to run for office than men (Lawless and Fox 2012, 10). This reveals that self-assessment in terms of running for office is a major factor in women's level of ambition, meaning that they desire a position in office and have the confidence and support to carry out that desire. The public perception follows the notion that "politics is a man's game," which may in turn be the reason why women perceive themselves as less able than men to be in office (Cormack 2016, 627). If history says time and time again that men dominate politics, then that perspective will naturally influence a gender gap in politics because women and people will believe it.

Due to the negative public perception identified by Lawless and Fox, Cormack says female candidates accumulate more experience than male candidates before running for office (2016, 631). Women work harder to be heard and seen as equal to their male counterparts which was proven in a previous study, that women in office reveal forty-four percent more overall votes

than men do to their constituents. This is to portray through an open level of communication that they, as females, are as capable of doing the work as men are. The communication of the legislators is strategic in their goals to influence voters' opinions and perceptions of the legislators (Cormack 2016, 628 and 645). A 2012 survey done by Lawless, Fox and Feeley revealed that if women were aligned with the Democratic party, held membership in a political interest group, held office as a student, or completed a law degree, women were more likely to consider running for office. Cormack and Lawless et al. reveal the lengths women go to in order to appear and even feel more qualified, perhaps to overcompensate for their perceived inabilities. This aligns with the overall perception in which women feel that the electoral system is biased against them, and thus they work harder to prove themselves (Lawless and Fox 2012, 7 and Cormack 2016, 627). Although perception and reality are two very different things, perception plays a role in the level of ambition women have to be in office.

This body of research supports an overall relationship between gender and political ambition, revealing that women have a lower level of political ambition than men do. Much of the narrative behind this topic revolves around women being historically disadvantaged which has trickled down into contemporary day, with women facing more barriers than men in access to political positions. Women are extremely underrepresented in the political world compared to the proportion of the population that they hold. According to 2014 data, men were fifty-five percent more likely to run for office than women (Fox and Lawless 2014, 400). For policies to be made in the best interests of women, solutions must be found to increase their political ambition and make them believe that they are just as capable as men at holding office, and combined with the proper resources, encourage them to run. Not only would this achieve proportional representation, but also substantive, because typically female and male legislator's preferences

differ as well as their styles of leadership (Sue Tolleson Rinehart 1991 as cited in Lawless and Fox 2010, 5). While there have been great improvements toward female representation in recent decades, the literature suggests that there is still a persistent gender gap.

Previous Surveys

Previous surveys conducted on gender and running for office provide information for the survey conducted in my research. Lawless and Fox are important contributors to the research behind gender and political ambition or the decision to run for office. Multiple surveys performed in their research were helpful in creating mine. The first survey I examined was a random sample of men and women in careers that were most commonly matched to the professional backgrounds of the members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The five most common careers of U.S. Representatives before they entered office were lawyers, business executives, legislative members, educators and political activists (Fox, Lawless and Feeley 2001, 416). This informed my question about the local town and city council members previous careers to see if people in local office came mostly from those most common career paths or did not. Fox, Lawless and Feeley sent the survey to 500 men and women, with those careers, because that put them in the eligibility pool. They were trying to find out reasons behind running for office or not running for office of people who were qualified to do so. Fox, Lawless and Feeley specifically chose those occupations not only because they were most common careers of current U.S. legislators, but also because they are positions that were traditionally dominated by men, perpetuating the underrepresentation of women (2001, 417). This helped to inform my survey because I can examine how within different groups of people, certain variables may be more influential than others.

Another survey done by Lawless and Fox in 2011 revealed the continuous underrepresentation of women in politics due to their lack of political ambition, regardless of time that passed. It was an updated survey with samples of men and women from nearly equal demographics. The goal at hand was to explain the lack of change in the political environment regardless of various events like U.S. involved wars or female elections, from their survey ten years earlier. This 2011 survey, despite the changed environment, revealed that when asked if they had ever considered running for office, women were sixteen percentage points less likely than men to have said they did (Lawless and Fox 2012, 4). A shocking result was that while men's interest in running for office remained nearly unchanged over the ten-year period, women's interest actually dropped four percentage points from eighteen percent to fourteen percent from 2001 to 2011. This survey also resulted in proof that women are more likely than men to perceive politics as competitive and biased against them, believing that men raise significantly more money for their campaigns (Lawless and Fox 2012, 7). The findings remained consistent again in terms of self-perception. Men were sixty percent more likely to believe that they were "very qualified" to run for office compared to women, who were twice as likely to believe they were "not at all qualified" (Lawless and Fox 2012, 9). The content of this research and survey helps to inform my survey of active legislators at the local level.

Fox and Lawless have done a lot of work in the field of uncovering why there is a gender gap in politics. While the questions of different surveys remain similar, their work varies among different groups of people. A survey they performed in 2012 and published in 2014, was a random sample sent to approximately 4,000 high school and college students. Because young people may not yet consider running for office as a whole, not varying between gender, they also asked a series of questions based on future career. Fox and Lawless were trying to account for

the general notion that perhaps young people just are not yet thinking about their future in politics. The most common career paths linked to people in office have been determined as lawyers, business executives, educators, and a few others. Having this data allows them to ask questions based on things that young people are considering, especially those in high school and college, who are deciding what career path they want to pursue in college or after college graduation. Career based questions offer a more indirect analysis of who hopes to have a future in politics. This survey reveals the different approaches young men and women take when considering career paths. While I did not survey young people, it is important to understand the various factors that influence the decision-making processes of young people to see how it affects their future in politics.

II. Theory

In order to implement plausible solutions to the gender gap in politics, the problems that created this gap must first be identified. The theory here is that if women are educated, trained, encouraged and recruited to hold leadership positions, they will have a greater desire to run for office. With more women campaigning, there is a greater chance of female representation. Recruitment is a large aspect of women campaigning, because research reveals that, women running heavily depends on being recruited. Typically, a woman will not just think she can run for office and then do it, like a man would. People tell men that they should run, and men think more often than not, think that they can. A woman needs someone to suggest it to her and provide her the resources to fund a campaign, and then a woman is equally as capable of winning and succeeding in office (Lawless and Fox 2012, 11-12). Previous theories suggest that the gender gap is due to traditional gender socialization, which helps to inform my theory, that perceptions of traditional gender roles influence the lack of women in office (Fox, Lawless and

Feeley 2001, 413). The Fox, Lawless and Feeley research revealed that both men and women were more likely to consider candidacy if someone suggested to them that they run for office, however, in their research, men were fourteen percentage points more likely than women to receive that suggestion. The theory behind this finding is that because of the validation that the suggestion provides, women may feel less legitimate in their candidacies without that external support (2001, 424). That theory, again, helps to inform mine, in which validation from political actors provides candidates with the feeling that they can and should run for office, but that the ones most likely to receive that validation are men, who already feel as though they belong in leadership positions regardless. Efforts are required to change the public perception of women's leadership capabilities compared to a man's, which could positively impact the most common deterrence factors that contribute to the lack of female political ambition. Women are faced with more barriers when running for political office than men, so I also imagine they have different experiences once in office than men do.

The independent variable is gender. This will be measured at an individual unit of analysis. The responses to the survey conducted in my research will be compared between genders. The dependent variable is the decision to run for office. Each question acts as the different factor that influenced the decision to run for office. The questions asked deal with things that may encourage or deter women from running for office.

Hypothesis 1: *Self-perception, public-perception, career path, recruitment, and political party are all contributing factors in a women's decision to run for local office.*

Hypothesis 2: *The factors affecting the decision to run for office affect women more than they affect men, if they have any effect on men at all.*

Null Hypothesis 1: *There is no relationship between gender and the decision to run for local office.*

Null Hypothesis 2: *The contributing factors towards deciding to run for office do not differ between gender.*

While the gender gap in politics is a national and even world-wide phenomenon, I will be looking at the gap at the local level in New York state. Perhaps starting at the lower level of government will contribute to reducing or eliminating the gender gap in politics because it is smaller and can be achieved in more efficient means. From the local level, it can work its way up to state and national levels. People may be recruited from the local political level to run for office in congressional or statewide elections. My survey seeks to identify what encourages versus what discourages the difference in the decision to run for office between men and women.

III. Research Design

To test my theory, that men have less influential factors and barriers when deciding to run for office than women do, I conducted a survey. This survey was sent out to New York State town and city council members. The cities and towns were collected by going to each town and city website and finding their council member listings. When the page would explicitly provide emails, I recorded the member's name, gender and email. I excluded certain cities and towns for purely technical reasons, when the email was not provided on the website. This process was done repeatedly once I gathered emails from roughly one hundred towns and cities. The survey was emailed to 575 legislators, 393 of which were men and 182 of which were women. The survey received 128 responses, giving it a twenty-three percent response rate. The survey contained thirty questions, the first explaining what it was in regard to, allowing them to proceed with the survey or opt out. The second to last question offered an option to leave comments with

whatever information the legislator wanted to share, and the last question was for the legislator to provide optional contact information for further questions or interviews. The survey in its entirety is attached in Section V., Appendix I., where each question with its possible answers is listed in the order the respondents viewed them.

The survey itself asked questions informed by prior research done on the subject of gender in politics and previous surveys conducted by Lawless and Fox. Questions were asked to discover what factors were significant or insignificant in someone's decision to run for office. To measure how gender impacts the decision to run for office, the responses will be compared between males and females. This will ultimately determine if factors like traditional gender norms, public-perception, self-perception, recruitment and professional career impacts the decision to run for office, differently amongst men and women. Political party is an important factor to consider because that could change the results. The Democratic party prioritizes gender equality as an ideological issue more so than the Republican party. The females of the Democratic party are also more likely to recruit female candidates, therefore, the legislators who identify with said party, could have different beliefs toward the relationship between gender and political ambition.

The survey I conducted has weaknesses that must be accounted for. I strategically asked questions inspired by previous research and surveys, that I believed would grant different responses between men and women. Perhaps there are other factors that I did not think to consider that would differently impact men and women. While the survey had a strong response rate of twenty-three percent, it is difficult to know how representative the sample is of local legislators in the state or country more broadly. The survey was sent out to only New York State town and city council members, so it would be informative to survey other states' local

governments for future research and a further insight on experiences of legislators throughout the country.

IV. Results

Table I: *Question: Why Run*

		What is your gender?		
		Male	Female	Total
	General desire to hold office	68.57%	47.50%	60.91%
Were you motivated to run for office based on the general desire to hold office or because of a specific policy issue?	Specific policy issue	31.43%	52.50%	39.09%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table I represents the question, “Were you motivated to run for office based on the general desire to hold office or because of a specific policy issue?” which had results consistent with previous research. Men were twenty-one percentage points more likely than women to have a general desire to hold office, while women were twenty-one percentage points more likely to be motivated by a specific policy issue than men. The fact that men have a general desire to hold office while women are motivated by specific policy issues, makes sense due to traditional norms and perceptions. Maybe this occurs because men are more likely to be suggested to run for office and be recruited, and therefore, think that they can and should. While women feel disadvantaged, less qualified and are less likely to receive suggestions or be recruited it may take

specific issue that they feel passionate enough about to act and actually run for office to make a change themselves.

Below are two comments provided by legislators who shared experiences that were relevant to this question. One man, aged seventy-three, from the town of Union Vale wrote:

“Gender makes no difference, it depends on your desire to help your community and knowing the needs and concerns. Having a working plan that you could implement to meet those needs. Not selling yourself based on your gender, race or ethnic background but by convincing that you are the best person for the job. In my local position it isn't a matter of party but on who you are. What I would like for all elected officials to realize is that they don't owe to a party but to those who elected them. You now represent all the people in your district, Town, County, State or Nation and they all deserve to be heard, only then will our government begin to work again.”

He clearly believes that his sole responsibility is to represent the people who elected him, regardless of gender, race, or political party. However, he explained that his desire to be in office was based on the general desire to help the community, and this comment suggests that that was his motivation, rather than a specific policy issue. One woman, aged forty-seven, from the town of Lagrangeville wrote:

“My decision to run was ultimately guided by my children. So many things were impactful to them and the world around them that they had no say over. I believe myself to be an advocate and giving a voice to the vulnerable and voiceless. I stepped up to be the change in the world.”

This woman was inspired to run for office because of her children. While she does not note a specific policy issue as her motivation, she does explain how she believes her purpose as one to provide a voice and advocate for those who are vulnerable and voiceless. This is a more specific motivation, and there are policies that come along with those who are overlooked or marginalized.

Table II: Question: Encouraged Sex

		What is your gender?		
		Male	Female	Total
	Mostly the same sex as me	21.74%	5.26%	15.89%
Were the people who were most involved in getting you to run for office people of the same sex as you, people of a different sex, or a mix?	Mostly a different sex than me	4.35%	23.68%	11.21%
	A mix	73.91%	71.05%	72.90%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Next, Table II asks the question, “Were the people who were most involved in getting you to run for office people of the same sex as you, people of a different sex, or a mix?” This revealed a mixture of results. The most common response by males and females was “A mix,” each responding from seventy-one to seventy-three percentage points. While it is progressive that both men and women are encouraging both men and women, regardless of gender, to run for office, this question also has differing results between genders. Men were sixteen percentage points more likely than women to be encouraged to run for office by people of the same sex.

Women were nineteen percentage points more likely than men to be encouraged to run for office by people of a different sex. The general finding from these results is that men are the most common group of people to encourage men and women to run for office. This can be attributed to the simple fact that more men are in office than women are, so by default, they are the ones doing the encouraging. Women are not encouraging of other women and that is problematic because when women see other women in office, they are more likely to feel that they are as capable because another woman holds the position. One woman, aged forty-four, from the city of Albany, wrote:

“When I first ran for office, I was actually discouraged from running because I was a stay at home mom. In fact, one more powerful locally elected woman asked whether I had the intelligence to serve on the school board because I was a stay at home mom. I have been involved in campaigns for a long time, know that I am good at working with people, am a pretty confident person, so it didn't deter me. When I just ran for city council I informed people I was running and lined up support. Encouragement is important, but you have to make your choice, know why you are good, and move forward. Politics is long term; one race is just laying the groundwork for another. However, I work with many women who are regularly deterred from running because of comments like the one I received when I first ran. My frequent statement to women candidates is: Do you think a man would say that or do that or react that way? The answer is always no. Politics is knowing and dealing with the reality of things, so you can be part of the system and hopefully change the negatives of that reality for future people.”

This experience was shocking yet expected, because as a stay at home mom, she was discouraged to run for office. It was expected because it was reflective of traditional gender roles, where women stay at home to take care of children while others perceive them as less intelligent. It was shocking because the individual responsible for discouraging her to run for office was another woman. Women need to be united and encourage more women to be in office, especially when they do have the personal desire to do so, in order to increase female representation in politics and other positions of leadership. Women in office are the ones who make other women feel that they too can be in office, therefore, the pressure is on them to change the lack of political ambition in women.

Table III: Question: Respect

		What is your gender?		
		Male	Female	Total
		Agree strongly	60.81%	60.98%
Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: "The other elected officials I serve with treat me with respect."	Agree somewhat	32.43%	34.15%	33.04%
	Neither agree nor disagree	2.70%	0.00%	1.74%
	Disagree somewhat	4.05%	4.88%	4.35%
	Disagree strongly	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table IV: Question: Listen

		What is your gender?		
		Male	Female	Total
		Agree strongly	52.70%	53.66%
Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement: "The other elected officials I serve with listen to what I have to say."	Agree somewhat	39.19%	41.46%	40.00%
	Neither agree nor disagree	2.70%	2.44%	2.61%
	Disagree somewhat	4.05%	2.44%	3.48%
	Disagree strongly	1.35%	0.00%	0.87%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table III and Table IV ask questions with similar subject matter, so I will analyze their results together. Both male and female legislators responded to these questions similarly about how respected by (Table III) and listened to (Table IV) they feel from the other elected officials they serve with. Not only did they answer roughly equally, but the majority of men and women also agreed strongly or agreed somewhat with those statements. The results here are a double positive, because men and women felt equally respected by others and listened to by others, while also agreeing, rather than disagreeing, that the local political environment is courteous of others. Roughly sixty percent of male and female respondents answered that they agree strongly that the other elected officials they serve with treat them with respect. Roughly fifty-two to fifty-three percent of male and female respondents answered that they agree strongly that the other elected officials they serve with listen to what they have to say.

I asked this question to gauge how men and women are treated by those they serve with and if they felt a difference in treatment compared to the opposite sex. While these results were

contrary to my expectations, based on the barriers and challenges women face in the political environment, this is a positive outcome, in which men and women responded to the questions almost equally. Perhaps it is the case that in local political office, men and women are treated or feel that they are treated equally, but because of the sample size of the survey, it would be interesting to see if this trend held up throughout local governments in other states. One comment from a fifty-two-year-old woman, from an anonymous council, combined with the results leads me to believe that in certain places, women are still treated poorly, but that it is not the norm everywhere. She wrote,

“The political arena does not treat women with respect in my city. The good old boys network treats women as appendages and only good enough for support roles. Independent thinking is discouraged.”

This woman fell under the small portion of people who disagreed with the statements in Table III and Table IV. Based on the history of the political environment, which has led to the gender gap in politics and created barriers for women to enter the political arena, her experience is not surprising, however, contradictory to the results of the questions. Extending the survey to other states would change the results of these questions because it allows for more respondents in other towns and cities to share their experiences, where other women may feel they are treated poorly by their male counterparts, as this woman does. This is why it important to identify treatment and experiences women face, to improve the experiences of those who are not treated as equals. The more that women feel equally respected and listened to, the more women will realize they can hold positions in office. Another reason as to why the results turned out the way they did is because of the pool of people I surveyed. These are people who have been successful in running for office, as they are elected officials, and research suggested that once in office,

women perform just as well as men, it’s just a matter of deciding to run (Lawless and Fox 2012, 2). So, in theory, if women do just as well as men once in office, they would be treated equally regardless of history.

Table V: Question: Experience

		What is your gender?		
		Male	Female	Total
	Worked or volunteered for a campaign	30.99%	45.00%	36.04%
Prior to being elected, what kind of political experience did you have? (Select all that apply)	Worked or volunteered for a public official	11.27%	27.50%	17.12%
	Was involved in an interest or advocacy group	35.21%	45.00%	38.74%
	Was involved in politics in a smaller setting (e.g. college, union, work, etc.)	30.99%	32.50%	31.53%
	Other	49.30%	30.00%	42.34%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table V represents the question, “Prior to be elected, what kind of political experience did you have?” Excluding the “other” category which includes “No political experience,” many of which respondents wrote in, and the “was involved in politics in smaller setting” category, which women did select slightly more than men, there were very different results between men and women to this question. Women were fifteen percentage points more likely than men to have worked or volunteered for a campaign. Women were sixteen percentage points more likely than men to have worked or volunteered for a public official. Women were ten percentage points

more likely than men to have been involved in an interest or advocacy group. The works of Fox and Lawless support my findings, citing that women acquire more political experience prior to running for office to show that they are capable of doing a job that many, as well as themselves, believe they are less qualified to do. In a sense, women could be overcompensating because of those barriers they face, that men do not think about as much because the political world was set up for them. Men traditionally dominated politics and did not have to consider ways to win people over as much as women have had to, to fight their way into a world where the electoral environment is biased against them (Lawless and Fox 2012, 7). One female legislator, aged seventy-two, from an unknown location, shared an experience consistent with the idea that women generally acquire more political experience than men. She wrote,

“When I was in high school my mother ran for office and I campaigned with her. I majored in Political Science in college and became active in politics as a young mother. I ran for the town board and served for ten years and then became town supervisor for an additional ten years. After 20 years of service I retired but after two years I ran again and am serving in the 4th year of a four-year term. I am not seeking re-election. I was the first female supervisor of our town.”

This woman grew up in a political environment, so perhaps she had an advantage in her feeling of belongingness. While young, her mother ran for office, so she had a role model to look up to and know that she could do the same, and she also campaigned with her mom, so she had a real sense of the process. She went on to study Political Science, and became a member of her town government, and later the first female supervisor of her town. This is a first-hand example of a woman who gathered political experience throughout her lifetime and was successful in being elected to local office.

Table VI: Question: Impact on Desire

		What is your gender?		
		Male	Female	Total
	It was a discouraging factor	50.68%	51.22%	50.88%
How did each of the following impact your desire to run for office? - Feeling that you might need to participate in negative campaigning	It did not effect my decision	49.32%	46.34%	48.25%
	It was an encouraging factor	0.00%	2.44%	0.88%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	It was a discouraging factor	33.78%	26.83%	31.30%
How did each of the following impact your desire to run for office? - Knowing that you needed to fundraise	It did not effect my decision	64.86%	68.29%	66.09%
	It was an encouraging factor	1.35%	4.88%	2.61%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	It was a discouraging factor	10.96%	2.44%	7.89%
How did each of the following impact your desire to run for office? - The need to develop connections with campaign supporters	It did not effect my decision	63.01%	39.02%	54.39%
	It was an encouraging factor	26.03%	58.54%	37.72%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	It was a discouraging factor	25.68%	22.50%	24.56%
How did each of the following impact your desire to run for office? - Having your name and family in public spotlight	It did not effect my decision	70.27%	67.50%	69.30%
	It was an encouraging factor	4.05%	10.00%	6.14%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
	It was a discouraging factor	10.81%	7.32%	9.57%
How did each of the following impact your desire to run for office? - Committing your time	It did not effect my decision	63.51%	60.98%	62.61%
	It was an encouraging factor	25.68%	31.71%	27.83%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table VI pictured above represents the question, “How did each of the following impact your desire to run for office?” and presented five factors in which respondents could reply, “it was a discouraging factor,” “it did not affect my decision,” or “it was an encouraging factor.” The five options were, feeling that you might need to participate in negative campaigning, knowing that you needed to fundraise, the need to develop connections with campaign supporters, having your name and family in the public spotlight, and committing your time. Men and women answered

roughly equally that feeling that they may need to participate in negative campaigning was either a discouraging factor or it was a factor that did not affect their decision. They responded very similarly again, the majority of which, answered that knowing that they needed to fundraise did not affect their decision. The last two factors, having your name and family in the public spotlight, and committing your time again received similar responses between men and women. In a 2001 Lawless, Fox, and Feeley survey, when men and women were asked how they viewed certain aspects of the campaign process, the results were almost equal between genders, contrary to their expectations (420-421). They expected that traditional socialization of gender roles and the lack of female political ambition would negatively affect how they view certain aspects of the campaign process, however, similar to my survey, men and women responded almost equally. There was one factor that did have interesting results.

The need to develop campaign supporters was the factor with the most dramatic results between male and female respondents. Women were thirty-two percentage points more likely than men to consider the development of connections with campaign supporters as an encouraging factor. Men were twenty-four percentage points more likely than women to respond saying that the factor did not impact their decision. This may be due to the fact that because women feel like the electoral system is biased against them and that they are under-qualified to be in these positions (Lawless and Fox 2012), when they develop connections with campaign supports, they feel like their candidacy is more legitimized in a way. Support from people or organizations that have campaign experience and provide resources to the candidates, may be more encouraging for women because then they will be seen by the public as more capable and qualified. Men responded to this saying it did not impact their decision and that response could be because men already feel qualified simply because they are men and the political world was

created in favor of them, therefore they feel legitimacy within themselves and the development of those connections just does not affect them at all.

Table VII: Question: How Long

		What is your gender?		
		Male	Female	Total
	I have always felt this way	22.22%	17.95%	20.72%
How long have you believed that you possessed the qualities necessary to be in public office? Select the one that best applies to you.	Since high school	6.94%	10.26%	8.11%
	Since college	13.89%	20.51%	16.22%
	Since I began my career	30.56%	28.21%	29.73%
	Only very recently	26.39%	23.08%	25.23%
	Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Research has suggested that women are less likely to consider themselves as confident, competitive, and risk-taking, some of the qualities relevant to political actors. In a 2012 survey, men were seven to ten percentage points more likely than women to consider themselves as possessing those qualities (Lawless and Fox 2012, 10). The question in Table VII from my survey gets at a similar point, while not asking that exact question, because the women I surveyed were in office, and therefore, most likely believe they possess the qualities to be in office. The 2014 survey conducted by Fox and Lawless on high-school and college age kids to determine if they felt they possessed the qualities to be in office someday, also goes in hand with the question in Table VII. The question was, “How long have you believed that you possessed

the qualities necessary to be in public office? Select the one that best applies to you.” The options to select were, “I have always felt this way,” “Since high school,” “Since college,” “Since I began my career,” and “Only very recently.” There were not large percentage differences between male and female respondents, and the most common responses were “I have always felt this way” at roughly twenty percent of both men and women, “Since I began my career” at roughly twenty-nine percent of both men and women, and “Only very recently” at between twenty-three and twenty-six percent of both men and women. While the results amongst men and women were similar, their answers were interesting to examine. If men and women had not always felt that way their whole life, more often than not, during their career or more recently, while in office, was when they felt they possessed the qualities to be in office. So, for both men and women, it took them a long time to feel they possessed those qualities.

Relating this back to the Fox and Lawless survey of young people and if they feel they would want to be in office someday, young men were thirteen percentage points more likely to have considered running for office, while young men were two-thirds more likely than women to have definite plans to run for office in the future. That research revealed that young men and women were not equally politically ambitious (2014). That survey was conducted on young people, who have less worldly experience than adults. Perhaps, these young people, and more so young men, as they grow up, change their minds and decide on new paths. Once they have had career experiences and decided to work in the political field, they could have realized that maybe they did not possess the qualities related to being in office or were not as qualified as they once thought they were. My respondents, majority aged forty-five to seventy-five, were once kids and maybe they would have had similar responses to a survey like that of Fox and Lawless. They answered this survey question in Table VII through a more retrospective lens, thinking back to

when they believed they first possessed the qualities to run for office. Ultimately, men and women took a long time to feel qualified, but it would be inciteful if Fox and Lawless surveyed that same group of young people in say, twenty-five years, to see how their lives have changed, how differently they perceive the political world, and if their responses held up and they did pursue office.

V. Discussion

From a broader prospective, seventy-three of the survey respondents were male and forty-one were female. The survey was sent to 393 men and 182 women; therefore, it makes sense that there were more male respondents. Some of the town and city councils had one woman in a five-person council, and for the larger councils' women still held fewer positions than men. Some of the councils even had no women. Some of the councils had more women than men but that was an extremely less likely occurrence than any other council types I previously described. Looking at the survey from this broader point of view rather than comparing responses between men and women who did reply, reveals that men do dominate politics, and more specifically, there are more men in local town and city councils throughout New York State. These findings are true regardless of factors that influenced or did not influence men and women to run for office. Women make up half of the U.S. population and that should be reflected in politics, but it still is not, and that is why it is so important to identify the reasons behind the gender gap.

Looking back on the research design, I would not change the format and questions within the survey. Although, had there been more time, I would have liked to send the survey to more legislators in other states with different demographic backgrounds than New York. This could provide for a more representative sample of local U.S. politics as a whole. I hypothesized that factors like traditional gender roles, public perception, self-perception, political party,

recruitment, and professional career would differently influence a woman's decision to run for office, as opposed to their male counterparts. I was not entirely accurate, as some factors did have significant differences between male and female respondents. Perhaps this is because times have changed since 2012, the most recent studies I examined to conduct my survey, or because the local political setting is different than the state, congressional, and national settings. Factors like previous political experience, encouragement to run for office, aspects of the campaign process, and what motivated people to run for office were differently influential between men and women. However, factors like respect from other elected officials, and how long legislators believed they possessed the qualities to be in office, did not differently influence men and women. Had there been less time constraints, I would have liked to follow up with the legislators who provided contact information to get more context behind certain experiences they shared and reasoning as to why they answered questions the way they did.

The Lawless and Fox research published in 2012, contained surveys conducted ten years apart from one another, in 2001 and 2011, to examine changes in the political environment in terms of female political ambition. In the future, it would be informative to conduct my survey again, to examine the changes in the local political environment. Ultimately, the research I conducted did shed light on experiences local town and city council members face in office, and how men and women are faced with different challenges. The gender gap in political ambition has been persistent throughout history, and into contemporary day, but with recent events, may be changing. Women deserve proportional representation in order to have policies in their best interest pursued and implemented, and hopefully it will happen one day.

VI. Appendix I: Morgan's City and Town Council Member Survey

accept

You are being asked to participate in a survey by Morgan Eckwall, a student at SUNY New Paltz, under the guidance of Dr. Scott Minkoff, a faculty member at SUNY New Paltz. The survey takes less than 10 minutes to complete and is aimed at learning how local elected officials in upstate New York decide to run for office. *The information you provide on this survey is 100% anonymous and cannot be traced back to you unless you provide your name for a follow-up interview at the end of the survey.* The information collected will be used by Morgan Eckwall in the writing of a research paper.

If you have any questions about your participation, please email Dr. Scott Minkoff at minkoffs@newpaltz.edu.

Do you wish to proceed?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
-

position Which of the following *best* describes your current political position?

- Council or Board Member (1)
 - Chairperson of Council or Board (2)
 - Mayor or Supervisor (3)
 - Member of a Legislature (4)
 - Other (5) _____
-

fullparttime Is your current elected position full time or part time?

- Full Time (1)
 - Part Time (2)
-

howlong How long have you believed that you possessed the qualities necessary to be in public office? Select the one that best applies to you.

- I have always felt this way (1)
 - Since high school (2)
 - Since college (3)
 - Since I began my career (4)
 - Only very recently (5)
-

recruited Were you recruited to run for office or did you decide to seek office yourself?

- Recruited to run (1)
 - Decided to run (2)
 - Other (3) _____
-

encouraged Before you ran office, did any of the following people encourage you to run? (Select all that apply)

- Party official (1)
 - Current elected official (2)
 - Professional colleague (3)
 - Family member (4)
 - Somebody in your religious community (5)
 - Other (6) _____
 - Nobody encouraged me (7)
-

encouragedsex Were the people who were most involved in getting you to run for office people of the same sex as you, people of a different sex, or a mix?

- Mostly the same sex as me (1)
 - Mostly a different sex than me (2)
 - A mix (3)
-

whyrun Were you motivated to run for office based on the general desire to hold office or because of a specific policy issue?

- General desire to hold office (1)
 - Specific policy issue (2)
-

issuerun When you decided to run for office, what policy issues were most important to you?
Check all that apply.

- Increasing taxes (1)
 - Lowering taxes (2)
 - Increasing the services your government provides (3)
 - Decreasing the services your government provides (4)
 - Racial equality issues (5)
 - Gender equality issues (6)
 - LGBTQ equality issues (7)
 - Agricultural issues (8)
 - Local economic development issues (9)
 - Improving the overall quality of local governance (10)
-

impactondesire How did each of the following impact your desire to run for office?

	It was a discouraging factor (1)	It did not affect my decision (2)	It was an encouraging factor (3)
Feeling that you might need to participate in negative campaigning (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowing that you needed to fundraise (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The need to develop connections with campaign supporters (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having your name and family in public spotlight (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Committing your time (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

kids Did you have children under the age of 18 when you first ran for office?

- Yes (1)
 - No, but had kids over 18 at the time (2)
 - No, but had kids after getting elected (3)
-

experience Prior to being elected, what kind of political experience did you have? (Select all that apply)

- Worked or volunteered for a campaign (1)
 - Worked or volunteered for a public official (2)
 - Was involved in an interest or advocacy group (3)
 - Was involved in politics in a smaller setting (e.g. college, union, work, etc.) (4)
 - Other (5) _____
-

listen Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement:

"The other elected officials I serve with listen to what I have to say."

- Agree strongly (1)
 - Agree somewhat (2)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
 - Disagree somewhat (4)
 - Disagree strongly (5)
-

respect Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement:

"The other elected officials I serve with treat me with respect."

- Agree strongly (1)
 - Agree somewhat (2)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
 - Disagree somewhat (4)
 - Disagree strongly (5)
-

higheroffice Would you consider seeking congressional or statewide office?

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - If recruited (3)
 - Don't know (4)
-

party What political party are you affiliated with?

- Democrat (1)
 - Republican (2)
 - Independent (3)
 - Other (4)
-

ideology Which of the following best identifies your political ideology on economic and social issues?

	Very Liberal (1)	Liberal (2)	Moderate (3)	Conservative (4)	Very Conservative (5)
Economic Issues (1)	<input type="radio"/>				
Social Issues (2)	<input type="radio"/>				

impactprior Prior to being elected to office, how much impact did you think you would have on local policy if elected?

- A big impact (1)
 - A moderate impact (2)
 - A small impact (9)
 - No Impact (10)
 - Don't Know (11)
-

impactafter Now that you have served in elected office, do you think you have a significant influence on local policy?

- I have a big impact (1)
 - I have a moderate impact (2)
 - I have a small impact (3)
 - I have no impact (4)
 - Don't Know (5)
-

gender What is your gender?

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Other (3)
-

ageran How old were you when you first ran for public office?

▼ 18 (1) ... 100 (83)

agenow What is your current age?

▼ 18 (1) ... 100 (83)

job What is your career outside of politics? If your current elected position is full time, what was your career prior to entering politics?

- Lawyer (1)
 - Business owner or executive (2)
 - Legislative staff member (3)
 - Educator (4)
 - Political activist (5)
 - Military (6)
 - Other government position (7)
 - Stay at home parent (8)
 - Retired (9)
 - Student (11)
 - Unemployed (12)
 - Other (10) _____
-

educ What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree (1)
 - High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED) (2)
 - Some college but no degree (3)
 - Associate degree in college (2-year) (4)
 - Bachelor's degree in college (4-year) (5)
 - Master's degree (6)
 - Doctoral degree (7)
 - Professional degree (JD, MD) (8)
-

race Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

- White (1)
 - Black or African American (2)
 - American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
 - Asian (4)
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
 - Other (6) _____
-

hisp Do you consider yourself to be of Hispanic origin?

Yes (1)

No (2)

inc Please select the option that best describes your total household income.

▼ Less than \$10,000 (1) ... \$200,000 or more (13)

open This research focuses on the connection between gender and the decision to run for local political office. Please use the space below to share any experiences or stories that might shed light on that process as it applies to you.

followup This survey was anonymous. If you are interested in doing a follow-up interview about your experiences running for local office, please provide your name and contact information.

Name (1) _____

City or Town (2) _____

Email Address or Phone Number (3)

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