More Women Can Run

Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures

Susan J. Carroll

and

Kira Sanbonmatsu

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CHAPTER 3

Gender and the Decision to Run for Office

Political scientists have generally adopted the framework of political ambition theory in studying candidacy for public office, typically assuming that a long-standing interest in public life precedes office holding (e.g., Schlesinger 1966). But ambition theory may not be an adequate framework for understanding how individuals decide to run for office. The traditional view that ambition precedes the decision to run may not always apply. For starters, political careers may not be planned, making them more difficult to predict. The process of candidate recruitment, in which potential candidates are approached and encouraged to run, can create candidates from individuals who had never before contemplated running for office. Meanwhile, a community concern or issue may attract a citizen's attention, spur activism, and eventually lead to a bid for elective office although a political candidacy was not something this citizen had previously considered.

We analyze state legislators' decisions to seek elective office in this chapter. Where possible, we compare state legislators in 2008 with state legislators in 1981. Our analysis reveals that a traditional model of ambition, in which candidacy is self-initiated, offers a less adequate account of how women reach office than of how men do so. We argue for an alternative model of candidacy, one that seems to apply more often to women than to men, that recognizes running for office as a relationally embedded decision.

RELATIONALLY EMBEDDED CANDIDACY

The study of political careers has focused on the ambitious politician (Schlesinger 1966). The decision to enter a given electoral contest can be understood as an individual, rational calculus in which a politician assesses the relative costs and benefits of running for a given office and the probability of winning (Black 1972; Rohde 1979; Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Brace 1984; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1987; Maisel et al. 1990; Stone, Maisel, and Maestas 2004). Gender has generally been thought to interact with the traditional ambition model, leading certain factors to weigh more heavily in women's decision making than in men's. For example, using the ambition model, Sarah Fulton and her colleagues (2006) have found gender differences in how state legislators reached a decision about pursuing a seat in the U.S. Congress. Similarly, Kathryn Pearson and Eric McGhee (2004) have argued that women congressional candidates are more likely to be strategic than men because of the hurdles that women face in electoral politics. Palmer and Simon (2003) have also used the ambition framework to understand changes over time in women's congressional office holding.

As Linda Fowler (1993) has observed, however, the ambition literature takes the ambitious politician as given. For this reason, ambition theory is better able to explain the decision calculus of those who already hold office than that of first-time candidates. This deficiency in the literature led scholars Richard L. Fox and Jennifer Lawless (2004) to focus on the origins of political ambition, studying women and men in those occupations from which officeholders most often emerge and distinguishing between two forms of political ambition, nascent and expressive. In their view, candidate emergence proceeds in two stages:

> In order to leave the pool of eligible candidates and run for office, potential candidates undergo a two-stage process that serves as a precursor to the strategic side of the decision to run. First, they must consider running for elective office; potential candidates will never emerge as actual candidates if the notion of launching a campaign and what that entails does not enter into their frame of consciousness. Only after the notion of a candidacy crosses a potential candidate's mind can he/she determine that the benefits to entering the electoral arena outweigh the costs. (Fox and Lawless 2004: 267)

Fox and Lawless contend that the lower rate of ambition found among women in the eligibility pool is problematic for the future of women's office holding because "nascent ambition—or the inclination to consider a

candidacy" (2005: 644) is a precursor to expressive ambition, or interest in a specific electoral contest.

Yet, women's pathways to politics, in particular, do not always seem to conform to a linear process in which nascent ambition precedes the candidacy decision. Instead, ambition and candidacy may arise simultaneously; recruitment for a specific race can spark interest in running for office. Rather than preceding political involvement, ambition may be a product of a political opportunity or the recruitment efforts of political parties or other actors (Fowler 1993; Aldrich 1995). For example, Sanbonmatsu's (2006b) study finds that political parties can create state legislative candidates: a potential candidate who has never thought about running can become a candidate because the party taps him or her for a given race. It may not be necessary for women (or men) to harbor political ambition in order to run for public office. And Fox and Lawless (2010) argue that recruitment affects political ambition, implying that recruitment can be causally prior to nascent ambition.

Research conducted by Gary Moncrief, Peverill Squire, and Malcolm Jewell (2001) also casts doubt on whether the framework of ambition theory adequately captures the experiences of women candidates.[1] In a survey of nonincumbent state legislative candidates in eight states, Moncrief and his coauthors found that women were much more likely than men to seek a state legislative seat after receiving the suggestion to run. Women were much less likely than men to be what the authors call "self-starters" who reached the decision to run for the legislature entirely on their own. Meanwhile, women were more likely than men to be "persuaded" candidates who decided to run for the legislature after receiving the suggestion to run from someone else. Women were also more likely than men to be "encouraged" candidates, who reported a mix of their own thinking and the suggestion of someone else.

Based on this earlier research as well as the findings of our own research presented in this chapter, we question whether existing accounts of candidacy that are premised on the idea of ambition are as applicable to women's pathways to office as they are to men's. The ambition framework envisions individuals with a long-standing interest in politics who run for office under the right electoral conditions. We do not wish to argue that there is a "male" or "female" way of making the decision to seek office, but we do advance an alternative view of candidacy that may more often characterize women's decision-making process than men's.

1. See Squire and Moncrief (2010) for additional evidence.

We argue that for women more than for men, candidacy is a "relationally embedded decision." By relationally embedded decision, we mean that women's decision making about office holding is more likely to be influenced by the beliefs and reactions, both real and perceived, of other people and to involve considerations of how candidacy and office holding would affect the lives of others with whom the potential candidate has close relationships. The candidacy decision-making process takes place in the context of a network of relationships and is deeply influenced by relational considerations. This view is consistent with the findings of research on gender differences in both leadership styles and decision making in other contexts. For example, social-psychological research by Alice Eagly and others has found that men are viewed as more agentic (e.g., assertive, ambitious, confident, and competitive), while women are viewed as more communal (e.g., nurturant, sensitive to the needs of others, helpful, and supportive), and these differences seem to affect their leadership styles. Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) have found that women managers have a more transformational leadership style, with the greatest gender differences evident on a scale of "individualized consideration," which focused on mentoring followers and attending to their individual needs. This pattern of women being more relational and other-oriented is evident in other research on gender differences in leadership, such as that of Judy B. Rosener (1990), who found women managers to have an "interactive leadership" style. And, of course, women's relational orientation has also been evident in research on gender differences in moral decision making, most notably the work of Carol Gilligan (1993) who found the concepts of care and responsibility figured centrally in women's resolution of moral dilemmas.[2]

There are clear reasons to expect that women's decision making about running for office will be more influenced by relationships with other people. The candidate emergence process occurs within larger gendered social and political contexts. The gender gap in candidacy is often attributed to gender differences in social roles, and we, too, believe that gender differences in social and economic roles and in the household division of labor give rise to different patterns of decision making about candidacy. The home front holds consequences for how a woman juggles a career—including a career in politics—with family life. Although gender roles are changing, women still bear disproportionate responsibility for child care and household maintenance (Sayer 2005; Sayer et al. 2009). And the

2. See also England (1989) and Driscoll and Krook (2012) on feminist challenges to theories premised on an autonomous rational actor.

traditional division of labor in the home affects the resources, education, and skills available to women for political participation (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). We therefore would expect that women's decision making about running for office is more likely to include considerations about how other family members feel about the decision and how their lives might be affected.

Our analysis suggests this is the case. As we saw in chapter 2, the candidacy decisions of women legislators are very much affected by their relationships with other family members, especially their children. We found few women served in legislatures while their children were young, and much larger proportions of women than men reported that the fact that their children were older was a very important factor in their decision to run for their current legislative office.

Our interviews with women legislators were filled with references to the important role that family relationships played in women's decisions to seek elective office. One state representative explained her own decision and the timing of her candidacy this way:

> I do think it is harder for women to make that decision to spend a lot of time away from their kids.... I decided to do this when my kids were about three and six, but I put it off until they graduated high school. That is because I represent a rural district, and their whole school life I would have been in [the state capitol], and it wasn't a cost I wanted to pay.... And for men... if they are married, they have someone at home who can tend to the home fires.... If we had a wife, it would be better, but we don't have wives.

Another woman legislator who is very involved in candidate recruitment in her state observed:

> We very often encounter women who say, "Well, I have young kids; I definitely can't do it." I've seen women with young kids in the legislature who have had a hard time serving. So there really is a reality to it being difficult for women with young children, whereas men with young children don't seem to have much of a problem at all.

And she went on to explain that relationships with spouses strongly affect decisions as well:

> ...we've tried to get some specific women to run with husbands who are not supportive, and they don't do it. I have never seen them decide to do it over that objection when I've known about it.... [T]he spouse thing can go either way, but often when the male spouse doesn't want the female spouse to do it,... it does not happen.

Yet another state representative perhaps best explained how and why family relationships are more important to women's decisions to run:

> I think women and men weigh considerations about children and spouses differently. And I also think it is much harder for women, and here is why. First of all, I believe most women view themselves as the primary parent.... It is the mom who starts the dinner in the crock pot if she is not going to be home to make dinner. It is the mom who calls and says, "Did you do your homework?" If she is not there, she replaces herself: "Honey, can you pick up Joey from scouts tonight? I am going to be late getting home." It is mom who actually has primary responsibility for all those things involving children and husbands and houses. Now the husband can help, but he is usually helping. He is not the one who remembers that Joey needs to be picked up from football.... So to accept a job that actually has tremendous time demands is a harder choice for women because she has [to do] so much more to replace herself. And maybe she doesn't want to miss it either.... The time demands of a political job are way more than most other jobs a woman can take.... And not just the job, but there are also the other things. In the legislature we are... always running. So you are always attending a Boy Scout function or a fire company function or knocking on doors.... So if you are the primary parent, and most women are the primary parent, it is a harder decision to make and you need a lot of support.

It is not just women's roles in the home and family that may lead to differences in the way that women and men emerge as candidates. In our view the decision to run takes place in a political as well as a social context. While gender scholars tend to privilege social factors over political factors in accounts of gender inequalities in politics, we contend that gender is a political category as well as a social category. By political category, we mean that the formal, and informal exclusion of women from the right to vote and run for public office historically has had long-term consequences for women's relationship to electoral politics. Both political elites and the public see inequalities for women in contemporary electoral politics (CBS 2008; Sanbonmatsu 2006b). While the public voices support for the idea of electing more women to public office, the public is also comfortable with men occupying a majority of elected positions (Dolan and Sanbonmatsu 2009). Politics is a highly masculinized space, and women are still viewed as intruders whose presence disrupts the traditional order (Puwar 2004; Duerst-Lahti 2005). Meanwhile, women have internalized this sense of

themselves as outsiders to political life. For example, one effect of the under-representation of women in politics is that women potential candidates are less likely than men to view themselves as qualified for holding public office (Lawless and Fox 2005).

Because women traditionally have not had an equal role in political life, the dynamics of the candidate emergence process may be quite different for women than for men. In the remainder of this chapter we explore the decision to run for office, finding gender differences that provide evidence for a relationally embedded model of candidacy and seem to reflect the effects of women's historical exclusion from electoral politics.

THE INITIAL DECISION TO RUN FOR ELECTIVE OFFICE

Because of the masculine nature of mainstream politics and women's history of marginalization in the electoral arena, one might well expect women to be less likely than men to view elective office holding as an appropriate career choice or even a realistic aspiration. As a result, women more often than men might need encouragement to toss their hats into the ring and run for office.

The state legislature is the first foray into public office holding for many individuals. A majority of the women and men legislators we surveyed in 2008 ran for the legislature as their very first elective office (61.3 percent of women and 55.6 percent of their male colleagues), and we begin our analysis with these legislators whose first bid for office was for a legislative seat (see Figure 3.1).

A large gender gap is evident in how these state legislators made the decision to run for office the very first time.[3] The most striking gender differences are apparent among "pure recruits"—those who responded that they had never thought seriously about running until someone else suggested it. A majority of the women, 55.9 percent, had not seriously thought about running for the legislature before someone else suggested that they run. Although this was the most common response for women, it was the least common of three responses for men. Only 29.7 percent of men had never considered becoming a state legislative candidate until someone else suggested they run.

3. Our question is modeled on that of Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell (2001), although we queried legislators about the decision to run for their first elective office regardless of whether state legislative office was the first office sought. The Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell survey question concerned the decision to run for the legislature.

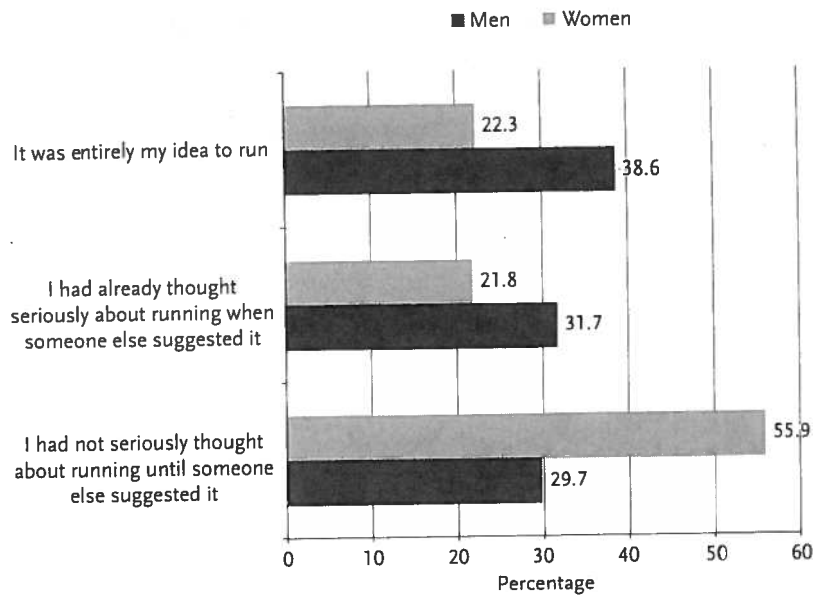

Figure 3.1
The Decision to Seek First Elective Office (among those who ran for the legislature first)
Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study.

While women were much more likely than men to be pure recruits, they were much less likely to be "self-starters." Less than one-quarter of women (22.3 percent) said that running for the legislature was entirely their idea in contrast to their male colleagues for whom this was the modal response (38.6 percent). Finally, 21.8 percent of women and 31.7 percent of their male colleagues chose the middle or hybrid response, saying that they had already seriously thought about running when someone else suggested it.[4] This gendered pattern holds when we analyze Democrats and Republicans separately.[5]

What about those legislators whose first bid for office was for a position other than a state legislative seat? Almost all began their foray into elective politics with a run for local or county office, with women more likely than

4. A chi-square test indicates that the relationship between gender and recruitment is statistically significant ($p \leq .01$).

5. Among Democrats who sought state legislative office first, for example, 57.3 percent of women and 30.6 percent of men were pure recruits and 21.7 percent of women and 41.3 percent of men were self-starters. Among Republicans, 50.9 percent of women and 29.1 percent of men were pure recruits and 25.0 percent of women and 35.8 percent of men were self-starters. These relationships between gender and recruitment are statistically significant ($p \leq .01$).

their male colleagues to have sought a position on a school board.[6] The vast majority sought a seat on a local council or school board in their first bid for elective office (see Table 3.1).

Among those legislators who first ran for office at the local or county level, we find the same pattern of gender differences as for legislators whose first run was for a state legislative seat (see Figure 3.2).[7] Nearly half of women (44.1 percent) were pure recruits who had not seriously thought about running for office until someone else suggested it. In contrast, only about one-quarter of men (25.8 percent) ran at the suggestion of someone else. Meanwhile, a notably smaller proportion of women (33.0 percent) than men (47.9 percent) were self-starters who said that running was entirely their idea.[8]

6. Because virtually all of the elective offices that were first sought were local or county, we describe these bids for office other than the state legislature as "local or county candidacies" for the remainder of the chapter.

7. This relationship is statistically significant ($p \leq .01$). The results are similar if we disaggregate legislators by political party. Among Democrats who ran for local or county office first, 45.1 percent of women and 22.1 percent of men were pure recruits and 32.6 percent of women and 51.3 percent of men were self-starters. This relationship is statistically significant ($p \leq .01$). Among Republicans, 40.9 percent of women and 29.8 percent of men were pure recruits and 34.4 percent of women and 44.4 percent of men were self-starters, although the relationship between gender and recruitment is not statistically significant.

8. Although women were more likely than men to be pure recruits and less likely to be self-starters regardless of the office they first sought, we do find one interesting difference between those who first ran for the legislature and those who first ran for local and county offices. Comparing Figures 3.1 and 3.2 reveals that the likelihood that candidacy was the legislator's own idea—rather than an idea posed by someone else—is somewhat greater among those legislators who first ran for local or county office than among those who first ran for the legislature. However, this difference is due in part to variations among the states in levels of professionalism of their legislatures and the way that legislative professionalism affects political career paths. In states with more professional legislatures, legislators generally have higher pay, spend more days in session, and have legislative staff; usually it also costs more to run for the legislature in such states. As a result, holding legislative office is considered more prestigious and desirable in these states than in states with less professionalized legislatures, especially the least professionalized "citizen" legislatures, where the gap between holding local and legislative office may be less pronounced. Legislators in our study, both women and men, from the states with the least professionalized citizen legislative institutions were more likely to run for the legislature than another position as their very first elective office. In these states with what the NCSL has called "blue legislatures," 69.2 percent of women and 61.3 percent of men ran for the legislature as their very first elective office. In contrast, less than half of legislators from the states with the most professionalized legislatures (NCSL's "red legislatures") ran for the legislature as their first office (43.0 percent of women and 38.9 percent of men). Meanwhile, 60.6 percent of women and 54.4 percent of men from states with hybrid legislatures (NCSL's "white legislatures")—or legislatures that combine elements of the more professionalized and more citizen legislatures—ran for the legislature as their first office. Thus, the legislature is much more likely to be an entry point for elective office-seeking in those states which have citizen legislatures. Legislators from states with more professionalized legislatures were more likely to get their start running at the local or county level. NCSL categories available at <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/legislatures/full-and-part-time-legislatures.aspx>. Accessed January 19, 2013.

9. This gender difference is statistically significant ($p \leq .01$).

Table 3.1. FIRST ELECTIVE OFFICE SOUGHT (AMONG THOSE WHO RAN FOR A FIRST OFFICE OTHER THAN THE LEGISLATURE)

	Women %	Men %
Town or city council	32.8*	43.3
School board (local or county)	37.1**	19.9
County legislator	10.9	11.7
Board or commission (local or county)	9.0	10.4
Executive (local or county, including mayor)	7.0	10.4
Other	3.1	4.3
N =	*256*	*231*

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$
Note: This table is limited to those state legislators who sought an office other than the legislature as their first elective office.
Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study.

For the large proportions of women (and smaller proportions of men) in our study who were pure recruits, the traditional ambition framework does not appear to be applicable. These individuals did not harbor ambition to run for office; a long-standing interest in politics was not activated by the existence of a political opportunity. Rather, for those who had never before considered running for office, ambition and candidacy appear to have occurred more or less simultaneously. Their political ambition was ignited when someone persuaded them to run for office.

Rather than conforming to the ambition model, the decisions to run made by these pure recruits seem more consistent with a relationally embedded model of candidacy where relationships with other people figure importantly in decision making. If we consider all legislators together regardless of whether or not they ran for the legislature as their first elective office, a majority of women, 51.2 percent, compared with 28.0 percent of their male colleagues, attributed the idea of candidacy to someone else.[9] So clearly, although some men's decisions to run for office came about because of the encouragement they received from others, such encouragement was far more commonly important for women. Consequently,

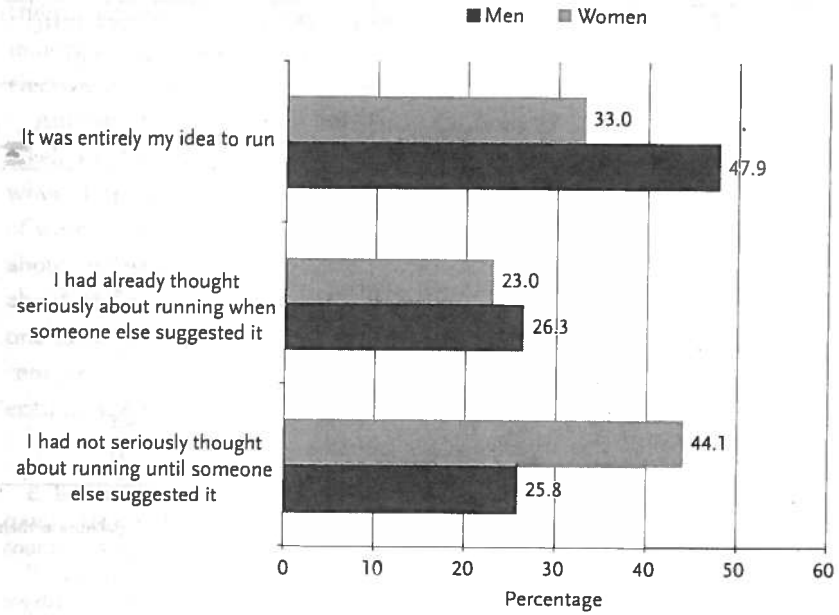

Figure 3.2
The Decision to Seek First Elective Office (among those who ran for a first office other than the legislature)
Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study.

women's decision making much more often than men's seems to take place in relationship with other people and to fit the embedded candidacy model. In contrast, men's decisions more frequently are consistent with a self-initiated notion of candidacy and thus more often seem consistent with the ambition framework. And given the sizable proportions of women and men who said they had already thought seriously about running when someone else suggested it, the decisions of many women and men seem to fit neither the embedded nor the ambition model of candidacy but rather are best described as having elements of both.

Our interviews with women legislators underscored the importance of encouragement and recruitment to women's decisions to run for office and the relationally embedded nature of their decision-making process. A Democratic state representative explained:

> Well, it never occurred to me that I could run for office.... I started out as planning commissioner, then city council [member], then mayor, then state legislator. But each time someone else had to suggest that I do that.... It never occurred to me to... boost myself.... I had to have other people, whom I respected, encourage me and tell me I was capable.

Similarly, a Republican state senator observed:

> ...women generally have to be talked into running.... [W]e who believe in bringing more women into public life work to help spread the word that women can run and can help make a difference when they get in. I don't think that has historically been the message that society sends to females.... I have spent a lot of time talking women into running, and I had to be talked into running myself.

A Democratic woman legislator also echoed the main finding of our survey data on decision making:

> Men are more often likely to say, "I always wanted to be a state legislator; I am a good business person." And they step up and say, "I am going to run." They step up on their own whereas women very rarely do it on their own. It takes someone talking them into it.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

In the previous chapter we found that on several different measures women were more likely than men to be active in their political parties before running for office. The relationships that women develop through these partisan activities may well prove critical in helping them decide to run for office.

About half of women state representatives in both 2008 and 1981 reached office after receiving encouragement for their candidacies from their party's leaders (see Table 3.2). Slightly higher proportions of women state representatives than their male colleagues said that their party encouraged their candidacy (54.9 percent of women and 49.9 percent of men). Similarly, among senators, more women than men reported party encouragement (56.6 percent of women compared with 43.5 percent of their male colleagues).

Gender differences were more apparent when legislators were asked to evaluate the importance of the support they received with women notably more likely than men to rate party support as very important to their decision to run. Among state representatives in 2008, 34.9 percent of women compared with 25.3 percent of their male colleagues rated "having the support of my party" as very important.[10] A similar gender difference was apparent among state senators.

10. This difference is statistically significant ($p \leq .01$).

Table 3.2. PARTY ENCOURAGEMENT FOR FIRST BID FOR CURRENT OFFICE

	1981		2008	
	Women %	Men %	Women %	Men %
Representatives				
Yes	46.5	47.7	54.9	49.9
N=	*428*	*197*	*530*	*439*
Senators				
Yes	54.4*	33.9	56.6*	43.5
N=	*68*	*62*	*168*	*115*

Question wording: "Think back to the first time you ran for the legislative office you now hold. Did leaders from your party actively seek you out and encourage you to run for this office?"
* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$
Source: 1981 and 2008 CAWP recruitment studies.

To the extent that women may be less likely to envision themselves as candidates, the support of party leaders may help counter this perception and bolster political confidence. One legislator we interviewed explained that party support shows a candidate "that somebody important thinks she is qualified.... That certainly helped me. I didn't think I was qualified. It wasn't until the party was recruiting me and investing in me." Another legislator noted:

> You do hear that story a lot where a woman has worked a lot on other people's campaigns and been a real reliable player in her political party. And on the basis of that, she is approached to run, and lots of times it is the first time the woman ever dared dream she could be the candidate. So the party... backing... goes a long way towards sending the right message to a woman that she is competent, capable, and ready to lead.

The fact that party leaders play a more prominent role in women's decisions to run than in men's is consistent with the contention that an embedded candidacy model, in which relationships with others play critical roles in the decision to run, is more applicable to women's decisions than to men's.

Evidence about the importance of relationships formed through organizational involvement is even more clear-cut than our findings about the role of parties. Although parties are more active and important in encouraging candidacies than organizations, the role of organizations is nevertheless significant.

As Table 3.3 indicates, large proportions of both women and men among state legislators were active in a variety of different types of civic, community, and professional organizations before seeking public office for the first time. Women were somewhat less likely than men to be involved in professional or business groups and labor organizations, and they were somewhat more likely than men to be active in children and youth organizations. The most dramatic difference is that women legislators were much more likely than their male counterparts to participate actively in women's organizations.

Despite the fact that both women and men serving in state legislatures had high levels of involvement in organizations, in both 2008 and 1981, and for legislators in both chambers, organizations played a larger role in the candidacies of women than men (see Table 3.4). More than one-quarter of women state representatives, compared with just under one-fifth of their male colleagues, said that an organization played a particularly important role in getting them to run the first time for their current office. Similar gender differences were apparent among state senators.

Table 3.3. ACTIVITY IN CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS PRIOR TO RUNNING FOR THE LEGISLATURE

	Representatives		Senators	
	Women %	Men %	Women %	Men %
Business or professional group	27.9**	38.9	37.1	43.0
Service club (e.g.,Rotary)	23.2*	28.3	24.5	31.7
Teachers'organization	10.2	11.0	11.8	7.5
Labor organization	7.8**	11.8	12.2	8.1
Children or youth organization	28.0	30.5	40.8**	22.6
Women's organization	29.3**	4.8	37.6**	2.2
A church-related or other religious group	27.9**	36.9	33.9	33.3
Civil rights or race/ethnic group	12.3	12.0	17.1**	8.6
N =	*982*	*643*	*245*	*186*

Question wording: "Prior to becoming a candidate for the first time, how active were you in any of the following organizations?" (percentage very active or active)
* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$
Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study.

Table 3.4. ORGANIZATION IMPORTANT TO FIRST BID FOR CURRENT OFFICE

	1981		2008	
	Women %	Men %	Women %	Men %
Representatives				
Yes	33.9**	16.3	28.4**	19.1
N =	*434*	*196*	*528*	*439*
Senators				
Yes	31.5	23.9	31.0**	17.9
N =	*73*	*67*	*168*	*112*

Question wording: "Excluding your political party, was there an organization that played a particularly important role in getting you to run the first time for the office you now hold?"
* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$
Source: 1981 and 2008 CAWP recruitment studies.

Women's organizations were especially important for women legislators. We asked women legislators a specific question about whether or not one or more women's organizations actively encouraged them to run the first time for their current office. Among state representatives, 21.4 percent of women state representatives reported that a women's organization actively encouraged them to run in 2008, slightly fewer than the 27.3 percent of women who reported similar encouragement in 1981. In contrast, more women senators were encouraged by women's organizations in 2008 (30.2 percent compared with 26.0 percent in 1981).

So, as with parties, many legislators of both genders had forged relationships with organizations through their participation in those groups prior to running for legislative office. Consistent with an embedded model of decision making, these relationships proved important in the decision to run for substantial proportions of women and men. However, relationships with organizations, especially women's organizations, more often figured importantly in women's decisions to run than in men's, consistent with the idea that a relationally embedded candidacy model is more applicable to women.

We can also see the important role that parties and organizations play among those legislators who attributed the candidacy idea to others or who described their initial decision to seek elective office as a combination of their thinking with encouragement from someone else. The idea for candidacy can derive from the political or personal lives of legislators. We asked those legislators who ran because they were encouraged or recruited to run to indicate the actor most influential in encouraging them. For the state legislators for whom the legislature was the first elective office sought, the single most influential source of encouragement of both women and men was a party official and/or legislative leader (see Table 3.5). The second most influential source of recruitment was an elected or appointed officeholder. Thus, political sources appear to be most influential in suggesting the idea of candidacy. Next most frequent after political sources were personal sources: the respondent's spouse or partner; another family member; or a friend, coworker, or acquaintance. Least common among both women and men was an organizational source of encouragement, but women were more likely than men to credit a member of an organization.

Many races for local office are nonpartisan, and thus it is not surprising that party sources were less influential for bids for local and county office than for state legislative bids. Nevertheless, for legislators who first ran at the local or county level, women were less likely than men to identify a party source and more likely to report an organizational source as the most influential source of encouragement (Table 3.5). Beyond this difference, however, women's and men's responses mostly overlapped, and in general, the pattern of gender differences we find overall holds for respondents from both major parties.[11]

Thus, women and men who ran because they were recruited or encouraged to do so gave credit to a range of actors for presenting them with the idea to run. While family relationships can often pose hindrances to women's political careers, here we see some limited evidence of a more positive role: that a family member can be the most influential source of recruitment. Also, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter, political actors play a large role in spurring legislators to seek office. Such recruitment is especially important for understanding how women reach the legislatures (Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

11. For example, 52.1 percent of Democratic women and 52.7 percent of Democratic men who ran for the legislature first (who were non-self-starters) credited a party or elected official with the recruitment idea; 48.3 percent of Republican women and 57.0 percent of Republican men did so. Compared with Republican men, Republican women were slightly less likely to cite a political source and somewhat more likely to cite a spousal source (26.4 percent of Republican women compared with 10.5 percent of Republican men). Among those who ran for local or county office first and listed a recruitment agent, 38.3 percent of Democratic women compared with 33.3 percent of Democratic men said a party or elected official was the most influential, compared with 45.0 percent of Republican women and 56.5 percent of Republican men. A similar spousal difference emerged among Republicans in this group, as well, with 16.7 percent of Republican women compared with 8.7 percent of Republican men citing their spouse.

Table 3.5. MOST INFLUENTIAL SOURCE OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR INITIAL DECISION TO SEEK ELECTIVE OFFICE

	State Legislative Office First		Local/County Office First	
	Women %	Men %	Women %	Men %
Political				
A party official and/or legislative leader from my party	29.4	31.9	15.8	21.8
An elected or appointed office holder	22.3	23.8	24.3	24.2
Personal				
My spouse or partner	17.1	13.5	14.7	11.3
A family member (other than spouse)	6.1	4.9	3.4	6.5
A friend, coworker, or acquaintance	13.5	15.7	24.9	26.6
Organizational				
A member of a women's organization	3.7	0.5*	6.2	2.4
A member of another organization or association	6.4	8.1	7.9	5.7
Other	1.5	1.6	2.8	1.6
N =	*327*	*185*	*177*	*124*

Question wording: "Who was the most influential person in encouraging you to run?"
Note: Data are presented for those legislators who ran because they were encouraged or recruited (not self-starters).
* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$
Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study.

MAIN REASON FOR RUNNING

Gender differences are evident, as well, in the responses by legislators to a question asking about the main reason they ran for their current state legislative office (see Table 3.6). These differences provide additional evidence that women's decisions to run are more consistent with a relationally embedded candidacy model while men's are more consistent with ambition theory.

In 2008, we asked legislators a closed-ended question: "Other than your desire to serve the public, what was the single most important reason that you decided to seek the office you now hold?" The most frequent reason given by women representatives and senators was a concern about one or more specific public policy issues. This was also the most frequent response for male senators and the second most frequent response for male representatives although women legislators in both chambers were notably more likely than men to choose this response.

While a public policy motivation for seeking public office is not directly relevant to either ambition or embedded candidacy models, the

Table 3.6. MOST IMPORTANT REASON LEGISLATOR SOUGHT CURRENT OFFICE

	Representatives		Senators	
	Women %	Men %	Women %	Men %
My concern about one or more specific public policy issues	35.9**	26.7	45.8	35.7
A party leader or an elected official asked me to run or serve	23.8**	14.8	14.9	7.8
My long-standing desire to be involved in politics	16.2**	28.9	15.5*	26.1
My desire to change the way government works	11.0*	16.6	12.5	20.0
Dissatisfaction with the incumbent	6.1	5.7	7.7	2.6
It seemed like a winnable race	1.9	1.6	0.6	2.6
Other	5.1	5.7	3.0	5.2
N =	*526*	*439*	*168*	*115*

Question wording: "Other than your desire to serve the public, what was the single most important reason that you decided to seek the office you now hold?"
* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$
Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study.

two other responses most commonly given as reasons for running are. The second most frequent reason why women representatives sought their current office was a relational one—that a party leader or elected official asked them to run—and this reason was offered by substantially more women than men at both state house and state senate levels. The sizable percentage of women state representatives who sought a seat in the legislature because they were recruited by a party leader or officeholder (23.8 percent) is particularly striking. This finding not only highlights the importance of relationships to the decision to run for many women but is also consistent with the idea that ambition may not always precede, but rather may in some cases be a by-product of, recruitment.

A long-standing desire to be involved in politics, which is, of course, a direct expression of political ambition, was cited considerably less frequently by women than men as the most important reason for seeking their current office. More than one-fourth of the male representatives and senators, compared with only 16.2 percent of women representatives and 15.5 percent of women senators, ran for their current office primarily for this reason.[12] Thus, consistent with our earlier finding that men were more likely than women to be self-starters, self-initiated candidacy is less likely to characterize women's bids for state legislative office. Because women do not necessarily aspire to office, the women who reach the legislature are more likely to do so because they received a suggestion to run. As one woman state legislator explained:

> ...perhaps men automatically think about a professional career in politics whereas women may not. But I think that once you introduce that idea to women, they recognize that absolutely [they should run], because when it comes to issues that are addressed in the legislature, those are issues that they are very in tune with—be it education, health care, family.... [I]t is just [a matter of] changing the mindset that historically...[politics] is not a profession that women automatically gravitate towards.

12. This is true of both parties. For example, among Democratic state representatives, 15.5 percent of women compared with 28.0 percent of men cited their long-standing desire to be involved in politics. Among Republican state representatives, 17.4 percent of women compared with 30.0 percent of men did so. These gender differences are statistically significant ($p \leq .01$).

CONCLUSION

We have found that the way that women reach office does not necessarily follow the linear pattern suggested by the ambition framework in which a long-standing interest in office-seeking leads to candidacy. While the pathway of some women legislators can be explained by an ambition framework, we have argued for an alternative conceptualization of relationally embedded decision making about running for office that moves beyond the individual, rational calculation of the ambitious politician. Our alternative view recognizes that candidacies can be initiated through recruitment and encouragement by others in the context of a specific political opportunity even in the absence of prior ambition. And our view argues that candidacy may be equally, or even more, dependent on the consequences of that candidacy for *others* than on the personal costs and benefits to the *candidate*.

Men's pathways to politics may not always follow a linear trajectory either. Nevertheless, we find that this alternative embedded model of candidacy is more likely to be found among women than among men.

Women's decision making about running for office takes place in both a social and a political context. Women's traditional gender roles and the persistence of the division of labor within society and the family have political consequences. In particular, these features of the social context lead women to give more weight in the decision-making process to the opinions of others and the effects of their decision upon others, especially family members.

But the political context matters as well. Politics traditionally has been and is still a masculinized domain. In turn, women more often seek support and encouragement before they enter what is far from gender-neutral territory. Encouragement from those in their political and personal networks—party leaders, elected officials, spouses, family members, friends, coworkers, organization members—often figures critically in women legislators' decisions to run. In fact, a majority of the women in our study attributed the candidacy idea to someone else.

Political science and politics itself have privileged the ambition model over the alternative embedded candidacy model we propose. But we would argue that either candidacy framework can successfully produce democratic self-governance. Indeed, embracing the relationally embedded notion of candidacy alongside the ambition model might actually enhance American democracy by making American government look more like the people.

Acknowledging the relationally embedded nature of women's candidacies can expand our ideas about who could emerge as candidates. Talented legislators need not have aspired to a political career from a young age.

The value of politics and public service may become clearer in the context of a specific race. A phone call from the house majority leader or the local district leader may be necessary for a person to realize that she (or he) could lead.

Taking a less linear path to public office is not an inherently inferior path. Nor is it problematic for officeholders, and particularly women, to take a range of relationships into account when considering candidacy. Because people are embedded in familial and other social and political relationships, it is only natural for people to be responsive to the viewpoints and needs of others. It is also logical that the pathways that under-represented groups take to elective office may depart from those taken by the dominant group.

The relationally embedded candidacy model suggests that organizations, elected officials, political parties, and even family members can persuade a woman to enter a race, regardless of whether she has previously thought about candidacy. By implication, then, widespread cultural changes in socialization patterns need not occur first in order to improve women's descriptive representation in the medium term.

As we will see in the coming chapters, the relationally embedded candidacy model has important implications for the level of women's office holding overall and for how political factors intersect with gender to promote or inhibit office holding for subgroups of women. Recognizing that women state legislative candidates need not have the same backgrounds as men (chapter 2) and that more than one model can explain candidate emergence (chapter 3), we turn next to understanding how party interacts with gender and candidacy.

CHAPTER 4

Republican Women State Legislators: Falling Behind

For the first three decades following the emergence of the contemporary women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, progress for women in American politics seemed inevitable. Changes in women's social roles and advances in their economic and educational status were accompanied by increases in women's political representation. Although women's political gains were incremental, many observers assumed that the changes occurring in women's lives would eventually lead more and more women to seek and win election to public office. Social change would lead to political change, and we would eventually reach parity if we were just patient enough.

Data on women's office holding from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s seemed to support this claim. At the state legislative level with each successive election, more women ran for office and more women were elected (see Figure 4.1). Similarly, at the statewide level, the trend over time was clearly upward.[1] Although progress was less evident at the congressional level, that changed with the 1992 elections and the so-called Year of the Woman. The number of women increased dramatically from thirty-two in the 102nd Congress (1991–1992) to fifty-four in the 103rd (1993–1994), and subsequently the numbers have continued to climb incrementally, reaching ninety-eight in the 113th Congress (2013–2014). Over the past two decades, the pattern of slow but steady

1. <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/statewide.php>. Accessed September 6, 2011.