CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

It Takes a Candidate

Why Women Don't Run for Office

It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office serves as the first systematic, nationwide empirical account of the manner in which gender affects political ambition. Based on data from the Citizen Political Ambition Study, a national survey we conducted of almost 3,800 "eligible candidates," we find that women, even in the highest tiers of professional accomplishment, are substantially less likely than men to demonstrate ambition to seek elected office. Women are less likely than men to be recruited to run for office. They are less likely than men to think they are "qualified" to run for office. And they are less likely than men to express a willingness to run for office in the future. This gender gap in political ambition persists across generations. Despite cultural evolution and society's changing attitudes toward women in politics, running for public office remains a much less attractive and feasible endeavor for women than for men.

Jennifer L. Lawless received her Ph.D. from Stanford University in 2003. She is currently an assistant professor of political science at Brown University, with a courtesy appointment at the Taubman Center for Public Policy. Her teaching and research focus on gender politics, electoral politics, and public opinion. She has published numerous articles in academic journals, such as *American Journal of Political Science, Political Research Quarterly, Legislative Studies Quarterly, Social Problems,* and *Women and Politics*. She is also the lead author of a public policy report used by EMILY's List, Emerge, and the Women's Campaign School at Yale to help promote and recruit women candidates. Dr. Lawless has become a recognized speaker on the subject of women candidates, frequently discussing these issues on national and local television and radio outlets.

Richard L. Fox is an associate professor of political science at Union College. He has also taught or held positions at Rutgers University, University of California–Santa Barbara, College Year in Athens, California State University–Fullerton, and the University of Wyoming. He is the author of *Gender Dynamics in Congressional Elections* (1997) and coauthor of *Tabloid Justice: The Criminal Justice System in the Age of Media Frenzy* (2001). He is also coeditor of *Gender and Elections: Change and Continuity Through 2004* (2006). He has authored or coauthored more than twenty articles and book chapters; his work has appeared in *The Journal of Politics, American Journal of Political Science, Social Problems, Political Psychology, PS, Political Research Quarterly,* and *Public Administration Review*. He has also written numerous op-ed articles, some of which have appeared in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

It Takes a Candidate

Why Women Don't Run for Office

JENNIFER L. LAWLESS
Brown University

RICHARD L. FOX
Union College

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521857451

© Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox 2005

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lawless, Jennifer L., 1975–
It takes a candidate : why women don't run for office / Jennifer L. Lawless,
Richard L. Fox.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-521-85745-7 (hardback) – ISBN 0-521-67414-X (pbk.)
1. Women in politics – United States. 2. Political participation – United States.
3. Women political candidates – United States. 4. Women – United States – Attitudes.
5. Sex role – United States. I. Fox, Richard L. II. Title.
HQ1236.5.U6L38 2005
320′.082 – dc22 2005011914

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85745-1 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-85745-7 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-67414-0 paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-67414-X paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for
the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or
third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication
and does not guarantee that any content on such
Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of Tables *page* ix
List of Figures xi
Acknowledgments xiii

1 Electoral Politics: Still a Man's World? 1
Representation, Equality, and the Study of Gender in Electoral Politics 4
Traditional Gender Socialization in the Context of U.S. Politics: The Central Argument and Its Implications 7
Traditional Family Role Orientations 8
Masculinized Ethos 9
Gendered Psyche 11
Organization of the Book 13

2 Explaining Women's Emergence in the Political Arena 16
Women and Elective Politics: The Numbers 19
Existing Explanations for Women's Underrepresentation 19
Societal Rejection and Cultural Evolution: The Discrimination Explanation 21
Institutional Inertia: The Incumbency Explanation 25
The Candidate Eligibility Pool: The Pipeline Explanation 26
The Missing Piece: Developing a Theory of Gender and Political Ambition 28
The Citizen Political Ambition Study 32

3 The Gender Gap in Political Ambition 37
Very Much the Same: Gender, Political Participation, and Political Interest 38

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

Very Much Different: Gender and Political Ambition 42
Stage One: Considering a Candidacy 43
Stage Two: Deciding to Enter the First Race 47
The "Winnowing Effect" 47
The Gender Gap in Elective Office Preferences 48
Conclusion 50

4 Barefoot, Pregnant, and Holding a Law Degree: Family Dynamics and Running for Office 51
Raised to Be a Candidate? 53
Eligible Candidates' Family Structures and Roles 58
Wife, Mother, and Candidate? Family Roles as Impediments to Political Ambition 64
Are Times Changing? Generational Differences in Political Ambition 70
Conclusion 73

5 Gender, Party, and Political Recruitment 75
Eligible Candidates' Political Attitudes and Partisanship 78
Who Gets Asked to Run for Office? 83
Political Recruitment and Considering a Candidacy 89
Conclusion 93

6 "I'm Just Not Qualified": Gendered Self-Perceptions of Candidate Viability 95
The Impact of Self-Perceived Qualifications on Political Ambition 96
Explanations for the Gender Gap in Self-Perceived Qualifications 102
The Sexist Environment 103
Gender Differences in Defining Political Qualifications 109
Different Yardsticks for Gauging Political Qualifications 114
Conclusion 116

7 Taking the Plunge: Deciding to Run for Office 118
Why Would Anyone Run for Office? Negative Perceptions of the Electoral Environment and Campaign Process 120
Gender and the Decision to Enter a Race 127
A Side Note on Political Culture and "Structural" Factors 136
Prospective Interest in Running for Office 139
Conclusion 143

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

8 Gender and the Future of Electoral Politics 145
Summarizing the Findings and Forecasting Women's Representation 146
Recasting the Study of Gender and Elections 153
Appendix A: The Citizen Political Ambition Study Sample Design and Data Collection 157
Appendix B: The Survey 160
Appendix C: The Interview Questionnaire 171
Appendix D: Variable Coding 176
Works Cited 181
Index 195

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

List of Tables

2.1 World Rankings of Women in National Legislatures *page* 18
2.2 Demographic and Political Profile of the Candidate Eligibility Pool 34
3.1 Offices Sought and Won by Eligible Candidates 42
3.2 Eligible Candidates' Interest in Running for Office, by Profession 44
3.3 The Baseline Model of Candidate Emergence from the Eligibility Pool 45
3.4 Eligible Candidates' Levels of Engagement in Activities that Precede a Political Candidacy 46
3.5 Gender Differences in Eligible Candidates' Elective Office Preferences 49
4.1 Eligible Candidates' Early Political Socialization Patterns 55
4.2 The Impact of a Politicized Upbringing on Considering a Candidacy 57
4.3 Eligible Candidates' Current Family Structures and Responsibilities 61
4.4 The Impact of Family Structures and Responsibilities on Considering a Candidacy 66
4.5 Eligible Candidates' Interest in Running for Office, across Generations 72
5.1 Eligible Candidates' Political Ideology 79
5.2 Eligible Candidates' Attitudes about Feminism 80
5.3 Eligible Candidates' Issue Priorities 81
5.4 Eligible Candidates' Predicted Probabilities of Considering a Candidacy, by Party 82

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

5.5 Feminism, Issue Priorities, and Considering a Candidacy 83
5.6 Eligible Candidates' Political Recruitment Experiences 85
5.7 Who Gets Recruited? 88
5.8 The Impact of Political Recruitment on Considering a Candidacy 92
6.1 Eligible Candidates' Perceptions of Their Qualifications to Run for Office 98
6.2 Eligible Candidates' Perceptions of Their Likelihood of Winning a Political Race 98
6.3 Who Perceives Themselves as Qualified to Run for Office? 99
6.4 The Impact of Self-Perceived Qualifications on Considering a Candidacy 101
7.1 Eligible Candidates' Preferred Means of Influencing the Policy Process 121
7.2 Eligible Candidates' Willingness to Engage in Campaign Activities 122
7.3 The Fully Specified Models of Who Considers Running for Office 128
7.4 Simulations of Key Variables Predicting Candidate Emergence 129
7.5 The Fully Specified Models of Who Runs for Office 132
7.6 Eligible Candidates' Future Interest in Running for Office 140
7.7 Factors that Might Encourage Eligible Candidates to Run for Office in the Future 141
8.1 Summary of Findings Categorized by the Three-Part Conception of Traditional Gender Socialization 148
8.2 College Students' Political Activism and Attitudes toward Running for Office 150

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

List of Figures

2.1 Women Serving in Elective Positions, 1979–2005 *page* 20
2.2 Public Attitudes toward Women in Politics, 1937–2002 23
2.3 Women's Presence in the Pipeline Professions, 1972–2002 27
3.1 Eligible Candidates' Levels of Political Participation (In the Last Year) 39
3.2 The Gender Gap in Candidate Emergence from the Eligibility Pool 41
4.1 Support for a Political Candidacy from a Spouse/Partner, Family Member, or Friend 69
5.1 Support for a Political Candidacy from an Electoral Gatekeeper 86
6.1 Substantive Effect of Self-Perceived Qualifications on Considering a Candidacy 102
6.2 Eligible Candidates' Perceptions of Gender Bias in the Corporate World 105
6.3 Eligible Candidates' Perceptions of Gender Bias in the Political Arena 106
7.1A Gender Differences in Political Recruitment throughout the Candidate Emergence Process 131
7.1B Gender Differences in Personal Support throughout the Candidate Emergence Process 131
7.1C Gender Differences in Self-Perceived Qualifications throughout the Candidate Emergence Process 131

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

Acknowledgments

We wrote this book because of our deep concern about women's political underrepresentation in the United States. Perhaps we are just impatient, but it seemed that women's broad inclusion in top elective offices was moving too slowly. And we sensed greater roadblocks to women's full political integration than had previously been identified. So, in an effort to uncover the degree to which gender interacts with the process through which people emerge as candidates, we went to work, surveying and speaking with thousands of women and men who are well suited to run for office. We believe this book goes a long way in explicating the prominent role gender plays in the evolution of political ambition.

When we began the project, we really did not know what we were getting into. The ramifications of what it would entail to administer – by ourselves – a multiwave national mail survey of seven thousand "eligible candidates" had not dawned on us. At the conclusion of a year-long foray into data collection, we had signed, folded, sealed, and stamped almost twenty-five thousand pieces of mail. We fed every envelope into the printer, by hand. We wrote a personal note on each letter, encouraging the recipient to complete the survey. We affixed an actual stamp to each piece of mail. If nothing else, this endless procession of mind-numbing tasks proved our shared mania.

Then, of course, there was the obsessive monitoring of the mail. On a bad day, when only a few completed surveys would arrive, our hopes for the project's success would plunge. Our faith was almost always restored the following day when hundreds of surveys would pour in. (As a pointer for those administering a mail survey, we learned that Mondays and Fridays are good mail days, but Tuesdays and Wednesdays are not.)

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

Ultimately, the project was a great success: almost four thousand good-hearted souls violated the rational choice paradigm and took the time to fill out a lengthy survey with nothing to gain other than advancing social science (and getting us off their backs).

The completion of a project like this requires help and assistance from numerous people and we would like to thank them all. We are particularly grateful to Walt Stone and Linda Fowler, both of whom offered extensive and insightful comments at various stages of this project. Kathy Dolan, who expressed support for the work even in its earliest stages, provided helpful feedback on the manuscript as well. We would also like to thank Sean Theriault, who read numerous drafts of the manuscript and provided a constant and willing sounding board for all of our ideas. He even stuffed and sealed a few envelopes. Dominique Tauzin joined us on many occasions to help put out the mail. In addition, she made numerous phone calls to badger people to complete the survey (something we did not have the nerve to do).

We are grateful to many people who provided feedback on the survey instrument and who read parts of the manuscript. Cliff Brown, Barbara Burrell, Eric R. A. N. Smith, Terry Weiner, and Harriet Woods offered advice on the survey. Jonathan Ma and Eliana Vasquez provided invaluable assistance in assembling the sample and helping to track the flow of mail. Scott Allard, Dave Brady, Dick Brody, Mo Fiorina, Amy Gangl, Claudine Gay, Simon Jackman, Kent Jennings, Terry Moe, Zoe Oxley, Kira Sanbonmatsu, Keith Shaw, Paul Sniderman, Sue Tolleson Rinehart, and Wendy Schiller helped us tighten our analysis and offer a more compelling contribution. We would also like to thank Jane Mansbridge and Lori Marso, who took the time to tutor two empirically minded political scientists in some of the finer points of feminist theory. And several students made important contributions to the project: Jinhee Chung, Adam Deitch, Shana Gotlieb, Peter Jewett, Erik Kindschi, and Marne Lenox.

From a practical standpoint, our endeavor would have been impossible without financial support from Brown University, Cal State Fullerton, the Carrie Chapman Catt Center at Iowa State University, Stanford University, and Union College. Debbie Walsh and Sue Carroll at the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University supported the project from the outset and also provided funding and a place to work. Norman Nie and the Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society helped fund one of the first waves of the survey. Darrell West of the Taubman Center for Public Policy at Brown

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521857457 - It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office
Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox
Frontmatter
More information

University helped issue a report based on our findings. Women's organizations and public officials are using the report to encourage more women to run for office.

We want to thank our friends, as well as our colleagues at Brown University and Union College, for providing great camaraderie. And we would be remiss not to thank our editor at Cambridge, Ed Parsons, who encouraged and supported us throughout the entire process, and who seems to share our need for immediate feedback.

Finally, we would like to thank our families, who put up with endless interruptions and listened to numerous complaint sessions about the progress of the book and the coauthor. Thank you Margie, John, Louis, Dominique, and Lila.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org