

Running with Strollers: The Impact of Family Life on Political Ambition

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Introduction

Congresswoman Pat Schroeder (D-CO) arrived on Capitol Hill in 1972 as the first woman Colorado voters sent to the U.S. House of Representatives. Known as a trail blazer for women in politics, Schroeder encountered myriad gender stereotypes during her time in office, often dismissively called “little Patsy” by her male colleagues and later writing in her autobiography that she felt “submerged in sexism.” With two small children at home by the time she entered Congress, Schroeder’s decision to be both a politician and a mother was often met with criticism and doubt. When asked how she could possibly balance the two competing roles, she famously replied “I have a brain and a uterus and I use both.”¹

Pat Schroeder is an example of a woman who overcame what might be one of the most significant barriers to women’s political ambition: motherhood responsibilities. Still, even after clearing the first hurdle by deciding to run for Congress, Schroeder continued to confront serious backlash as detractors questioned two things—one, how could a mother of small children competently serve in political office? That is, how can a mother cope with the time balance dilemma of two highly demanding jobs? Secondly, how good of a mother is Pat Schroeder? How will her children cope with their mother’s absence? The highly gendered nature of these questions were not lost on Schroeder herself who once responded to her critics: “One of the problems with being a working mother, whether you’re a Congresswoman or a stenographer or whatever, is that everybody feels perfectly free to come and tell

¹ “Patricia S. Schroeder, Representative 1973-1997, Democrat from Colorado.” Women in Congress, Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. Retrieved 4-26-11. Available: <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=220>; Pat Schroeder. 1989. *Champion of the Great American Family*. New York: Random House.

you what they think: 'I think what you're doing to your children is terrible.' 'I think you should be home.' They don't do that to men."²

Nearly thirty years later, how much has really changed for the prospects of mothers in politics? The same questions that plagued Pat Schroeder—how can a mother possibly balance childcare responsibilities with political office?; and moreover, *should* she try to strike such a balance?—are questions that still deter women from running for political office. The effects of these constraints are evident in the negative reactions to those mothers who *do* run for office, even in more “modern” times. Jane Swift, the first woman governor of Massachusetts, incited a public outrage when she became pregnant with twins while serving in office. While many Americans praised Sarah Palin’s ability to juggle motherhood and politics, just as many, if not more, questioned her choice to run for vice president with five children at home, including an infant with Down syndrome.³ In contrast, we are hard pressed to

² “Patricia S. Schroeder, Representative 1973-1997, Democrat from Colorado.”

³ A poll conducted by ABC found that 60% of respondents thought Palin made a good decision to join the Republican ticket given her family circumstances. Opinions were highly polarized by party, with Democrats much less likely to think Palin made a good decision. Jon Cohen and Jennifer Agiesta, “Partisanship Appears to Sway Opinions on Palin,” *Washington Post*, 6 September, 2008.

find many examples of men candidates who receive such scrutiny of their family life, save for when the media discovers an adulterous affair.

Mothers who enter the political world may alter their campaign strategies to combat negative voter perceptions of both their ability to be effective politicians and also of their character and image for seemingly “abandoning” their children. Thus, attitudes toward and beliefs about mother candidates should influence campaign strategy and voter perceptions of candidates once mothers choose to become candidates. But how might these constraints preclude women from running for office at all? I posit that two types of constraints—practical and psychological—reduce women’s political ambition, for several reasons. First, because mothers are still the primary caregivers to children (Hochschild 1997; Thomas 2002), mothers of dependent children should on average have less time to devote to a political career. Secondly, mothers may confront an electorate who holds the *perception* that they are unable to balance childcare responsibilities with politics. Finally, mothers confront social norm expectations that require them to devote their free time to their children. The “intensive mothering model” (Guendozi 2006) may influence mothers to believe that devoting too much time to their career will harm their children or reflect negatively on their own character and parenting skills. Mother candidates might also be hesitant to run if they believe their actions will be judged harshly by an electorate that believes in the intensive mothering model. Women may not want to be subject to the intense scrutiny that comes with the decision to run for office with children at home and thus avoid this backlash (including negative

publicity) until their children are older or simply not run at all. For men, these constraints do not really exist or at least not to the extent that their political ambition should be negatively affected. For one, men are not the primary caregivers and do not confront the time balance dilemma to the extent that women do. Secondly, there is no male equivalent to the intensive mothering model as social norms do not preclude men from having a career and a family.

The relationship between motherhood and political ambition, however, is not simple and may be dependent on other factors like the type of office, age of children, and party. Having children may dissuade women from entering politics overall, but for those women who do enter the political world, it should also shape women's *progressive* political ambition for higher offices. For example, the presence of children at home may not matter as much for women's ambition for city council as it does for the U.S. Congress, a much more demanding and high-profile office. Similarly, simply having children does not matter so much as the age of the children does. There is ample evidence that women enter politics at older ages, when their children are grown, which suggests that only minor children should constrain women's political ambitions.

In this paper, I first review the political ambition literature as it relates to gender and parental status differences. The literature is basically clear that motherhood functions as a liability for political women and constrains women's career pathways in politics. What is less clear, however, are the nuances of this fact, including contextual variables such as party and age of children. Furthermore, most of the research on family, gender, and politics rely on simple descriptive statistics rather than rigorous analyses that control for other factors that predict political ambition (see also Fox and Lawless 2011 for a critique of this literature). For example, many studies show that the average age of women's entrance into politics is much higher than men's, which scholars interpret to mean women enter the political sphere when their children are grown. Conversely, many mainstream political ambition studies fail to consider how gender and private considerations might also be relevant "costs" that affect political

ambition. I take these literatures forward by considering how a variety of gendered personal costs factor into explaining political ambition. Finally, I consider how prior private considerations, like the influence of separation from family on the decision to run, are shaped by gender and parenthood. That is, I contribute to the political ambition literature by considering the *indirect* effects of gender and parenthood on political ambition. To complete these goals empirically, I use two secondary datasets (2008 CAWP Recruitment Study and Candidate Emergence Study), both of which survey state legislators.

Prior Literature

Parenthood and Political Ambition

While most working mothers likely feel the time pressures of combining work and family life, mother politicians face highly demanding schedules that require them to travel often and be away from home. The difficulty of balancing motherhood and politics is evidenced by the different structures of men and women politicians' families. Studies that document the composition and characteristics of politicians' family lives inevitably uncover gender differences that provide clues as to how private life structures the political career choices of women. Women who enter politics are less likely than men to have children, and when they do have children, they have fewer (Carroll 1989; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2010; Dodson 1997; Kirkpatrick 1974; Thomas 2002). For example, in a survey of state legislators, Thomas (2002) found that 55% of women were childless compared to just 3% of men. Furthermore, women in politics tend to run when their children are older while the age of their children is basically irrelevant to the career decisions of men politicians (Carroll 1989; Dodson 1997; Sapiro 1982; Thomas 2002). Women with young children (under the age of 17) are also underrepresented in politics. While 23% of male state legislators have minor children, only about 14% of women do (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2010). Women with very young children are even more rare in politics: Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2010) found that of state representatives, 3% of women have children under the age of six compared to 8.2% of men. This line of research comes as no surprise given that women are still the

primary caregivers to children. While motherhood constrains both the choice to run for politics, and the timing of a political career, fathers enjoy considerably more freedom in their ability to have both a political career and family.

Traditional political ambition studies treat political ambition as a function of cost/benefit analysis (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1987; Black 1972; Brace 1984; Schlesinger 1966). The most common way scholars conceptualize political ambition is in terms of rational choice: the decision to run for office is equal to the benefits of the position minus the costs of running (Black 1972). Given that women and men politicians' have very different family structures (e.g. women are much more likely to be childless) as well as the different pathways to office (e.g. women begin their political careers at older ages), it seems a mistake to leave out gender and private commitments as explanatory variables in studies of political ambition. Very rarely is gender considered a relevant variable in the mainstream political ambition literature nor are personal costs included in the cost/benefit analysis, with the exception of a few key studies reviewed below.

An early study by Virginia Sapiro (1982) found that family life and private commitments constrain political women more than men. In a sample of delegates to the 1972 Democratic and Republican conventions, Sapiro determined that while both men and women perceive conflict between politics and family life, how this conflict is resolved differs by gender. Men are more likely than women to bear the "costs" of having a family and a demanding political career, while women are more likely to sacrifice their careers for their family. Sapiro positions political ambition and the decision to enter politics as a cost/benefit analysis in which women and men make different calculations that result in different outcomes:

We may view potential costs of office-holding as a series of filters that gradually screen out those who cannot pay the price. Political ambition is costly to both men and women in terms of their family commitments, but by the end it appears that most of the people who can or will pay the price are men (274).

Because of this perceived role conflict, then, women are less likely than men to run for office at all, more likely to run at later ages (when their children are grown), less likely to seek higher offices, and more likely to retire early (see also Blair and Henry 1981). Thirty years later, Sapiro's findings continue to hold. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2010) recently found that women state legislators were significantly more likely than their men counterparts to say that their decision to run for office was profoundly shaped by their children being old enough to make them feel comfortable being away from home.

While studies of potential public office-holders are rare because of the difficulty in studying those individuals who *do not* run, the few studies that do exist suggest that family obligations explain much of the political ambition gap between men and women potential officeholders. In a study of individuals who possessed the necessary qualifications to run for political office, Lawless and Fox (2005) found that 65 out of 100 women cited children as a reason for not running while only 3 out of 100 men cited the same hindrance. They also noted women's hesitance to run for office because they would be "looked down upon," either for taking time away from home or from work. Lawless and Fox (2005) also find that traditional family structures are still entrenched, even in the homes of eligible potential candidates. For example, 42% of eligible women said they were responsible for the majority of childcare compared to 4% of eligible men (Thomas 2002 reached similar conclusions). With much more childcare responsibility falling on the shoulders of women than men, eligible potential women candidates are more likely to consider running when they are older, after their family responsibilities as mothers diminish. This finding spans generations, as young women are just as likely as their older women counterparts to cite family obligations as a deterrent to running (Lawless and Fox 2005).

Fulton et al. (2006), in a survey of state legislators, found that the presence of children at home strongly predicts lower ambition for bids to the House of Representatives for women but not men. That is, women state legislators with children at home are far less politically ambitious compared to their men counterparts. In contrast, the presence of children at home actually *increases* political ambition of

fathers in comparison to childless men. These findings are significant because they suggest that children act as a barrier to women's progressive political ambition even for women who have already entered politics. Childcare responsibilities do not only inhibit the initial decision to run as well as the timing of entry into politics, but political ambition for higher office as well. The authors found no gender differences in the political ambitions of *childless* men and women.

The main problem with studies that assess how family obligations limit the career trajectory of political women and eligible potential candidates is that *the reason* for why family disproportionately impacts women's ambition is not given. The indirect evidence—that women in politics tend to be older, single, and childless—merely *suggests* that family obligations affect women's career trajectory. To understand the effect of parenthood, it ideally should be modeled with other variables that contribute to explaining political ambition. Furthermore, even studies that identify family obligations or the presence of children at home as a causal factor that explains men and women's differences in political ambition (e.g. Fulton et al. 2006) fail to explain exactly what it is about having children at home that affects the decision to run at all or for a higher office. Of course, the fact that children act as practical constraints in that the time spent rearing and attending to children leaves no space for political ambitions seems to be the obvious answer, but other explanations might also play a role. For example, women with children at home may not be dissuaded from running because of the time constraints, but rather because of a sense of obligation or duty to their children. Mothers may not run for fear of judgments—from voters and from their own family and social networks. The norm that dictates women should spend their time caring for and raising their children may be a strong psychological deterrent to running for political office.

Furthermore, most if not all political ambition studies fail to consider how the interaction of gender and party might also complicate the story. The two major parties differ significantly in their ideologies of the family, even to the point of polarization (Freeman 1993). Republicans place

tremendous value on the preservation of the nuclear family and the maintenance of a patriarchal structure that clearly defines women's place as in the home as primary caregivers (Critchlow 2005; Elder and Greene 2008; Evans 2003; Freeman 1993; Gillepsie 2000). This means that a Republican woman candidate with young children might be judged especially harshly, at least by members of their own party. Awareness and internalization of a more traditional gender ideology may also make Republican women less likely to run for office in the first place. But childless Republican women might be disadvantaged as well—Republican women who do not have children might be penalized for seeming “deviant” and possibly too masculine. If Republican women are indeed caught in a catch-22 because of ideologies of the family, then perhaps Republican beliefs about gender roles related to the family contribute to the explanation of Republican women's underrepresentation in the political world (CAWP 2012; Lawless and Pearson 2008).⁴ Republican ideology about the family can constrain Republican women by placing more emphasis on the intensive mothering model and thus deterring women from running for office, especially for highly demanding, visible offices like the U.S. Congress.

Methodology

The present analysis involves analyzing survey data of men and women state legislators to determine how their parental statuses influence political ambition, including the decision to run for Congress. In 2011, 1,745 or about 24% of state legislators are women (CAWP 2011). A healthy majority of women state legislators are Democratic (60.6%) compared to Republican (38.4%).⁵ Women's representation in the state legislature varies widely by state. For example, Colorado has the highest proportion of women state legislators (41%) compared to the lowest, South Carolina, where women make up only 9.4% of the state legislature (CAWP 2011). The state legislature is a common stepping stone or “breeding ground” for Congress (Schlesinger 1966), and I am interested in understanding how familial responsibilities might constrain the decision of legislators to run for Congress. My analysis will

⁴ Of women serving in the U.S. Congress, 32.2% are Republicans (CAWP 2012).

⁵ .6% of women state legislators identify as nonpartisan and .2% identify as progressives (CAWP 2010).

be based on two data sources—the 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study conducted by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) (Principal Investigators: Susan J. Carroll, Kira Sanbonmatsu, and Deborah Walsh) and a 1998 survey from the Candidate Emergence Study (Principal Investigators: L. Sandy Maisel, Walter J. Stone, and Cherie D. Maestas).⁶

State legislators have already run for and held political office, which means that they have successfully navigated and negotiated the constraints that may be associated with their parental status. However, as noted in the introduction, running and serving in the state legislature is quite unlike a bid for and seat in Congress. In fact, running for and serving in Congress is likely when parenthood becomes the most salient, especially for women. The job of a member of Congress is more demanding on time than the job of a state legislator and requires frequent trips to Washington, D.C. which take the Member of Congress away from their home.⁷ Members of Congress, then, experience more time constraints and are also at risk for being perceived as violating their gender roles much more so than state legislators. A woman state legislator is much less encumbered by her job and if she wants to, can probably be home every night to cook dinner for her family. Depending on the state she lives in, she may even have another occupation, possibly even full-time!⁸ Voters and the public may question women state legislators' ability to balance motherhood and politics as well as her proper role in each, but this vulnerability increases significantly for Members of Congress. Further, congressional contenders are more "public" than candidates for lower offices since congressional campaigns (especially those considered competitive) receive more attention. Thus, candidates face more scrutiny, as their lives and

⁶ See Appendix for survey details.

⁷ Although some members of Congress move their families to Washington, D.C., anecdotal evidence suggests that many of them do not, including women (See Lyndsey Layton, "Mom's in the House, With Kids at Home," *Washington Post*, July 19, 2007).

⁸ The "professionalization" of state legislatures varies widely by state. Some state legislatures are considered "citizen" assemblies in which the legislators act more as volunteer public servants than professional politicians. Representative in citizen legislatures spend considerably less time serving in office and in some states, receive almost no compensation. For example, New Hampshire, the quintessential "citizen assembly" provides state legislators \$200 per two-year term. In contrast, New York, a very professionalized state legislature, pays a base salary of \$79,500 (National Conference on State Legislatures, www.ncsl.org).

background are on display. Parental status is more likely to be noticed in campaigns for Congress, and mother candidates might especially be constrained by skepticism surrounding their decision to run for office with children at home. That is, candidates who run for Congress face exaggerated constraints of parenthood compared to candidates for lower office. State legislators, however, are ideal subjects to examine since a majority of Members of Congress were previously state legislators (Manning 2011). I am interested in determining gender differences in how parental status of candidates affects political ambition for Congress.

Both the CAWP and Candidate Emergence Study data contain useful measures to help explain the relationship among gender, parenthood, and political ambition. The Candidate Emergence Study survey specifically asks candidates about personal factors that would influence their interest in running for the U.S. House of Representatives, including factors like “separation from family and friends,” and “loss of personal and family privacy” (private considerations). The survey also asks the respondent how attracted he or she is to a career in the House of Representatives. The CAWP data includes an important measure for this analysis— how important the following factor was to the state legislator’s decision to run for office: “my children being old enough for me to feel comfortable not being home as much.” The data is also cut by gender and political party which will allow me to assess the interaction among gender, parental status, and party on political ambition more clearly.

With the CES data, I am not able to determine the specific ages of respondents’ children, only whether or not they are under the age of 18.⁹ This measure of age is useful in that I will at least be able to determine whether or not the respondent has children who (most likely) live at home versus adult children, but I will not be able to examine the nuances associated with a range of parental statuses. It is

⁹ The CAWP Survey asks respondents for the age of their youngest child, but this measure has little utility for the purposes of this analysis since the ambition question asks respondents If you had the necessary political support and the right opportunities, are there other elective or appointive political offices at any level of government that you would eventually like to hold. I present the results below regardless though I put little weight on these findings because of the flaws in this measure (for the purposes of my analysis) as I describe below.

easy to imagine that running for Congress with a toddler at home is quite different than running with a 17 year old adolescent about to leave for college. That is, the potential for both practical and role violation constraints to present themselves may increase as the age of the child decreases, thus negatively impacting mother candidates' ambition.

While the data described above is useful in that I will be able to determine how gender and parental status might affect political ambition of state legislators for Congress, the data will not permit me to understand *why* the gender and parental status interaction is significant to predicting political ambition. That is, I may be able to determine that having young children significantly constrains women's ambition but not men's, but I will not be able to adequately determine *what it is about motherhood* that explains this trend. To be sure, both datasets contain measures that may be useful in assessing the "why" of this study. The Candidate Emergence Study asks specifically how important the factors of separation from family and friends as well as loss of personal and family privacy influence the interest of the respondent in running for the House of Representatives. These measures will allow me to determine how gender and parental status may influence the weight of these factors, in political ambition for the House, but these measures are not clearly measures of practical constraints or role violations. While loss of personal and family privacy may somewhat measure the psychological constraints on mothers (e.g. if she believes media scrutiny will negatively affect her children or is concerned about being judged negatively), state legislators who are concerned about separation from family and friends may be responding to concerns they have about the ability to balance both roles or to the hostility they may encounter about their decision to separate from their families in the first place. Thus, data limitations preclude a straightforward analysis of my hypotheses concerning time constraints and role violations as impediments to political ambition.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Consistent with prior research, I expect to uncover gender differences in *family structure and composition* of men and women state legislators' families (Carroll 1989; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2010; Dodson 1997; Thomas 2002). That is, men should be more likely than women to have minor children while women should be more likely to have older children. Because Republican women may be more restricted by gender norms and expectations (Freeman 1993), Republican women may be especially more likely to run for office when their children are older, and therefore Republican mothers of young children should be scarce. That is, I expect to find a party x gender interaction with Republican women less likely to have younger children and more likely to have older children.

Hypothesis 2: I expect that the *private considerations* involved in the decision to run for office (children being old enough to feel comfortable, approval of spouse/partner, influence of separation from friends and family, and influence of personal and family privacy) will matter more to women and parents of young children compared to men and parents who do not have children at home. This hypothesis is based on both the practical and psychological constraints of motherhood. Mothers are constrained by the *time* it takes to raise children, which may influence the importance of private considerations in their decision making calculus (Sapiro 1982; Thomas 2002). But perhaps more importantly, they are restricted also by the norms of "intensive mothering" which require them to devote their time and attention to their children first and foremost (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Indeed, Lawless and Fox (2005) noted that women in their potential officeholder sample often cited the perception that they would be "looked down upon" for neglecting their parenting responsibilities. There should also be an interaction effect (gender x parental status) with mothers of young children being more strongly influenced by private considerations compared to men of young children. I also expect party to influence these relationships with Republican women most likely to ascribe importance to these private considerations, given the centrality of the traditional family structure in Republican ideology (Freeman 1993).

Hypothesis 3: I expect that gender and parental status should significantly predict differences in political ambition with women and parents of younger children less likely to be politically ambitious. That is, not only should the practical and psychological constraints of motherhood cause women to weigh family considerations more heavily than men in their decision-making calculus, but should also prevent them from emerging as candidates. Therefore, I expect a gender x parental status interaction effect in that women should be more affected by the presence of children at home compared to men with minor children.

Results: CAWP 2008 Survey

Turning first to the CAWP 2008 survey, Table 1 displays frequencies for key variables of the sample, including parental status and parental status by gender. Most respondents do not have a child under the age of 18 living at home (82%) compared to those who do (12%). However, consistent with my expectations (H1), men are more likely to have a child under 18 than women (22.7% vs. 14.3%, $p < .001$).

Table 1: Parental Status of Men and Women State Legislators

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Minor child | 18.0% |
| No minor child | 82.0% |
| Total N | 1257 |
| Men with minor children | 22.7% |
| Women with minor children*** | 14.3% |
| Total N | 1257 |

Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study

Note: ***= $p < .001$.

A look at parental status by gender and party suggests that both Democratic and Republican women are less likely than men to have a dependent child at home, and no significant differences by party emerge (Table 2). The survey also asked respondents to list the age of their youngest child, and while the average age of state legislators' youngest child suggests that state legislators overall tend to have adult children, women tend to have even older children than men. The average age of women's

youngest child is 28.0 while for men it is 24.7 ($p < .001$). Democratic women have significantly older children than Democratic men, but Republican women and men do not significantly differ in the average age of their youngest child. Thus, the evidence so far only partly confirms Hypothesis 1—while women have older children than men, Republican women are not more likely than their male counterparts to have older children. In fact, *Democratic* women appear to have older children compared to their Democratic male counterparts.

Table 2: Parental Status by Gender and Party

| | Democratic women | Democratic men | Republican women | Republican men |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Total sample | 38.9% | 22.5% | 17.1% | 21.5% |
| N | 394 | 235 | 190 | 241 |
| Have minor children | 13.5% *** | 22.7% | 15.6%+ | 21.4% |
| | | | | |
| Mean age of children | 28.5*** | 23.7 | 27.2 | 26.0 |
| N | 394 | 235 | 190 | 241 |

Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study

Note: += $p < .10$; ***= $p < .001$. In this table, the significant differences shown compare women to men in their respective parties.

Survey respondents were asked if they had ambition for other political offices. Specifically, the question was: “if you had the necessary political support and the right opportunities, are there other elective or appointive political offices at any level of government that you would eventually like to hold?” If the respondent answered in the affirmative, they were asked to indicate which office they would like to hold next and also the highest office they would like to hold in the future. There are a few problems with this question in its utility for the present analysis. One, the wording of the question effectively holds constant electoral support. The phrase “necessary political support,” can imply a lot of things, including the idea that the electorate would welcome the state legislator’s candidacy. Thus, parents of young children, when considering the answer to this question, may think of “the right opportunities” as related to when childcare responsibilities are irrelevant to their political careers. Also,

this question does not ask for a specific time frame for which the state legislator might consider a run for a higher office. This means that parents of young children might answer this question thinking of the far future, such as when their children are grown. Because of these limitations, it is no surprise that gender and parental status have no effect on how political ambition is measured through this survey item. That is, men and women and respondents who have dependent children and those who do not are not significantly different in their answers to these questions (results not shown). However, it does seem that parental status has an independent effect on political ambition, though regardless of gender. State legislators with minor children are far more likely to say they would like to seek another political position (82.2%) compared to those with no minor children (50.6%, $p < .001$). This result may be related to age of the state legislator—those with minor children are likely younger than those with grown children, and may hold more political ambitions for the future.

Private Considerations

Although the main political ambition questions in the CAWP survey are limited for purposes of this analysis, other questions are useful in their ability to examine how constraints of private life affect men and women's political career decisions differently (Hypothesis 2). One section of the survey lists various factors "that have been suggested to be important in influencing decisions to run for office." Respondents were asked to indicate how important each factor was in affecting their decision to run the first time for the office they currently hold from four answer choices: very important, somewhat important, not important, and not applicable. Relevant factors for the present analysis include "approval of my spouse or partner," and "my children being old enough for me to feel comfortable not being home." To be clear, respondents were asked to consider how these various factors influenced their choice to run for *state legislature*. The results, then, are interesting since they capture how family life may have acted as a constraint for a lower office and for many, the very first political office they sought. Because the state legislature is often the first office that political men and women seek, the answers to

these questions may reveal how family life influenced the decision to run for office at all. Also, because state legislatures are often stepping stones to Congress, it is important to understand the first barriers women and men faced when initially running for state legislature. Of course, every respondent in this survey overcame these barriers and actually did run for office. The results, then, should underestimate the effects of family life on political ambition, and provide some clues for how private life influences men and women's political ambition.

I first turn to the factor "my children being old enough for me to feel comfortable not being home as much." Almost a majority of respondents (48.7%) indicated that this factor was "very important," 17.8% said it was somewhat important, 8.1% indicated it was not important, and a quarter (25.4%) indicated this factor was not applicable. The finding that only 8.1% of respondents felt that the age of their children was irrelevant to their decision to run for office is interesting in itself as it suggests parental status and parenthood responsibilities matter a great deal for political ambition. I dropped the respondents who answered "not applicable" from the subsequent analysis since I interpret this response to mean the respondents are childless or did not have children at the time of their first run for state legislature.

Turning to Table 3, we see stark gender differences in how relevant this factor is to women and men's decisions to run for state legislature. 75.2% of mothers indicated that their children being old enough to feel comfortable not being at home as much was very important to their decision to run for office, compared to the 53.3% of men who felt the same way. In contrast, men are almost twice as likely as women to say that this factor was somewhat important to their decision. Fewer women than men say their children's ages were not at all important, with a small minority of both men and women giving this response. This first look at the data seems to confirm Hypothesis 2 and suggests that while comfort level in spending less time at home with children matters to both men and women, the *degree* to which this

matters varies strongly by gender, with women more likely to believe this factor is very important while men are more likely to cite it as somewhat important.

Table 3: Age of children factor by gender

| | Women | Men |
|--------------------|-------|-------|
| Very important | 75.2% | 53.3% |
| Somewhat important | 16.6% | 32.6% |
| Not important | 8.2% | 14.0% |
| N | 512 | 420 |

Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study

N=932; Differences between men and women significant at $p < .001$.

A look at how gender *and* party influence how state legislators answer this question is also revealing. Table 4 displays the percentages of Democratic and Republican men and women who answer how important their children being old enough to feel comfortable not being home as much was to their decision to run for office. Therefore, within both parties women are more constrained than men by the age of children factor. That is, the gender effect is relatively strong with both Democratic and Republican women ascribing more importance to this factor. However, the results also suggest that there is indeed a party effect with both more Republican women and men indicating this factor was very important compared to Democratic men and women. Democratic men seem to be the least constrained by this factor, as they score the highest in the “not important” category and the lowest for “very important.” Thus, the results of Table 4 provide evidence that is consistent with my expectation that private considerations matter more to women than men (Hypothesis 2), but inconsistent with my expectation that Republican women are especially constrained. Rather, gender (regardless of party) seems to be driving these differences whereas being Republican (regardless of gender) may also influence the importance of this private consideration, but there is no interaction effect.

Table 4: Age of children factor by gender and party

| | Democratic Women | Democratic Men | Republican Women | Republican Men |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Very important | 70.5% | 47.0% | 83.3% | 58.0% |
| Somewhat important | 19.3% | 38.0% | 12.1% | 28.3% |
| Not important | 10.2% | 15.0% | 4.6% | 13.7% |
| N | 332 | 200 | 174 | 212 |

Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study

“Below are various factors that have been suggested to be important in influencing decisions to run for office. Please indicate how important each factor was in affecting your decision to run for the first time for the office you know hold...my children being old enough for me to feel comfortable not being home as much.” 1=Very important; 2=Somewhat important; 3=Not important; 4=Not applicable
Total N=918; Differences between men and women of both Democratic and Republican parties significant at $p < .001$.

In order to further ascertain how party and gender work to influence how children constrain the decision to run for office, I ran a series of t-tests that examine the mean answer for women and men by party to the importance of their children being old enough when they ran for office. Comparing women to men, both Democratic and Republican men score higher on this variable, which indicates men report this factor was less important to their decision to run. Comparing by party, Democratic women cite their children being old enough as significantly less important compared to Republican women, but interestingly, this finding does not hold for men. That is, the age of their children was more important to Republican women’s decision to run compared to Democratic women, while the factor was about equally important to Democratic men as it was to Republican men. This evidence supports my expectations (H2) that private considerations may matter more to Republican women. Thus, party seems to influence how much parenthood matters for political ambition, but only for women with parental status being more of a liability for Republican women than Democratic women.

Approval of spouse or partner

Respondents were also asked to indicate how important the approval of their spouse or partner was to their decision to run for office. While this question, on its face, measures an aspect of family life that may contribute to explaining differences in political ambition, it does not directly ask about how

children may influence the decision to run. While I am generally interested in how private commitments affect the career choices of men and women, my project is specifically focused on how parenthood impacts political candidacy. However, I believe that approval or spousal support is very much related to parenthood in that the degree of support may be highly dependent on the spouse’s perceptions of the parenthood role and their partner’s ability to balance childcare responsibilities with politics (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994). In particular, women who enter politics may have to rely on their spouse to shoulder some of the childcare responsibilities that their political careers require them to shirk. Political women’s spouses, then, must be willing to deal with what is often perceived as a role reversal. On the other hand, empirical data shows that even when women enter politics they still end up burdened with the majority of domestic labor, including childcare responsibilities (Thomas 2002). That is, women can “have it all” as long as they are still home to put food on the table and raise their children. Still, succeeding in both roles—as a mother and politician—is no doubt a difficult feat, and it is easy to imagine that male spouses would react with skepticism towards their wives’ ability to handle both roles.

When asked how important the approval of their spouse or partner was to their initial bid for state legislature, few gender differences emerge. A slightly lower percentage of women (77.7%) than men (82.6%) indicated the approval of their spouse or partner was very important while a slightly higher percentage of women indicated it was somewhat important or not important ($p < .10$). Still, the data reveals that the vast majority of both women and men consider this factor highly important.

Table 5: Approval of spouse or partner factor by gender

| | Women | Men |
|--------------------|-------|-------|
| Very important | 77.7% | 82.6% |
| Somewhat important | 16.9% | 14.0% |
| Not important | 5.3% | 3.4% |
| N | 561 | 501 |

Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study

“Below are various factors that have been suggested to be important in influencing decisions to run for office. Please indicate how important each factor was in affecting your decision to run for the first time for the office you know hold...approval of my spouse or partner.” 1=Very important; 2=Somewhat important; 3=Not important; 4=Not applicable

N=1062; Differences between men and women are significant at $p < .10$.

I also consider how men and women of different parties answer this question, and Table 6 reveals that although more Republicans than Democrats indicate that approval of their spouses was very important, the biggest gap is between Democratic women (76.3%) and Republican men (85.2%). Therefore, contrary to my expectations (H2), gender does not have a particularly strong relationship with this private consideration, and if anything more men than women said approval of their spouse was very important to their decision. Also, there does not seem to be a gender x party interaction but rather just a straight party effect with Republican women and men state legislators more likely to ascribe importance to this factor than Democratic women and men. I attribute the lack of a gender effect to reflect the fact that women in the CAWP sample are less likely to be married than men state legislators (72.1% vs. 86.4%) are more likely to be divorced or widowed. Women are also less likely to have minor children. These two differences in family structure combined help make sense of this finding.

Table 6: Approval of spouse or partner factor by gender and party

| | Democratic Women | Democratic Men | Republican Women | Republican Men |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Very important | 76.3% | 79.8% | 81.5% | 85.2% |
| Somewhat important | 17.6% | 15.7% | 15.2% | 12.4% |
| Not important | 6.1% | 4.5% | 3.4% | 2.4% |
| N | 376 | 242 | 178 | 250 |

Source: 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study

Total N=1046

Candidate Emergence Study

Turning now to the 1998 Candidate Emergence Study, Table 7 displays basic information about the gender and parental status of the sample. Women make up 22.1% of the sample (which mirrors the proportion of women serving in state legislatures), 40% of respondents have children living at home, and 83.1% are married. Consistent with expectations (H1), the gender differences in age of children are

dramatic, with men legislators much more likely to have younger children than women legislators except in the age 12 and over category. 29.6% of women compared to 43.0% of men have children living at home, a stark 13-point difference. Women are almost three times less likely than men to have very young children (under age 6) and also less likely to have school aged children (age 6-12) compared to men (Table 8).

Table 7: CES Sample Characteristics

| | |
|----------------|-------|
| Women | 22.1% |
| Men | 77.9% |
| Total N | 861 |
| | |
| Democrats | 51.7% |
| Republicans | 45.3% |
| Total N | 868 |
| | |
| Married | 83.1% |
| Not married | 16.9% |
| Total N | 859 |
| | |
| Minor child | 40.0% |
| No minor child | 60.0% |
| Total N | 853 |

Source: Candidate Emergence Study, 1998

Note: "Not married" could include respondents who indicated they were never married, divorced or separated, and widowed. For party affiliation, 2.4% of respondents indicated they were Independent and .6% indicated "Other."

Table 8: Parental Status by Gender

| | Women | Men |
|-------------------------|----------|-------|
| Children living at home | 29.6%*** | 43.0% |
| Children under age 5 | 4.6%*** | 12.4% |
| Children 6-12 | 6.9%*** | 19.9% |
| Children over 12 | 25.6% | 29.0% |
| N | 121 | 680 |

Source: Candidate Emergence Study, 1998

**=p<.01

***=p<.001

Respondents were later asked to “indicate how the following factors would influence your interest in running for the U.S. House.” Respondents were asked to answer these questions even if they had no interest in the U.S. House. In contrast to the CAWP survey, this measure allows me to determine how family-related concerns impact ambition for Congress rather than the state legislature. The two factors most important to this analysis are the “separation from family and friends” and “lost personal and family privacy” factors. Each factor included five answer choices: strongly discourage, discourage, somewhat discourage, makes no difference, and not sure. Respondents who answered not sure were excluded from the analysis.

Influence of separation from family and friends

Overall, the modal answer to this factor is somewhat discourage, with 35.9% of the sample choosing this answer choice. About 20% say the influence of separation from family and friends is very discouraging, over a quarter (26.2%) think it is discouraging, and 18.1% find that it makes no difference. Thus, the vast majority of respondents indicate that separation from family and friends is at least somewhat discouraging to their interest in running for Congress. In fact, for both women and men, this factor was the second most discouraging factor only after “needing to raise large amounts of money” (See Appendix). I also display the distribution of answers by gender. More women (22.6%) than men (18.8%) say this factor would strongly discourage them from running. Fewer women than men say this factor would discourage them (20.4% vs. 28.2%) and a slightly larger proportion of women than men say the separation from their family and friend would make no difference (21.5% vs. 17.5%). Married state legislators and those with children at home are more discouraged by separation than their unmarried and childless (at least at home) counterparts (See Table 9). Consistent with expectations, looking only at respondents with minor children reveals a gender difference with women being slightly more discouraged ($M=2.51$) compared to men ($M=2.27$, $p<.10$). However, contrary to expectations (H2), men and women overall have similar means on the separation variable (2.51, 2.56 respectively).

Table 9: Influence of separation from friends and family by gender, marital status, and parental status

| Variable | Mean |
|---------------------|------|
| Men | 2.51 |
| Women | 2.56 |
| N | 842 |
| Not married | 3.04 |
| Married*** | 2.42 |
| N | 839 |
| No children at home | 2.67 |
| Children at home*** | 2.30 |
| N | 835 |

Source: Candidate Emergence Study, 1998

Dependent variable: "Please indicate how the following factors would influence your interest in running for the U.S. House. Please answer this question even if you have no interest in running for the U.S. House...separation from friends and family." Response choices: strongly discourage (1), discourage (2), somewhat discourage (3), makes no difference (4), not sure (dropped from analysis).

***= $p < .001$

Thus, simple difference of means tests reveals no gender differences in the extent to which this family-related factor impacts political ambition for the House of Representatives. These results go contrary to the expectation that the influence of separation from family and friends should discourage women much more than men. It could be that women in this sample are less likely to have a family than men.

Indeed, we saw previously that women are less likely to have children living at home, which may indicate that even if women are just as likely as men to have a family, their children are older and thus less constrained by the separation factor. It may also be the case that women are less likely to be married than men among state legislators in this sample.¹⁰ In order to control for these various factors, I model these independent variables to predict differences in the influence of separation of family.

Table 10 displays the results of a linear regression model in which gender, age, parental status, and marital status of potential candidates are modeled as independent variables that can predict differences in the influence of separation from family and friends. The results indicate that all variables are significant except gender. That is, potential candidates who are older find separation from family and friends less discouraging while those who are married and have dependent children find separation more discouraging.

The main effects of this model may mask interactive effects that also predict differences in influence of separation from family and friends. For example, it could be that marital status and having children at home affect men and women differently. As my theory suggests, women should be more constrained by these family factors than men. In order to investigate these nuances, I add interaction terms to the model in order to determine if marital and parental status affect men and women differently when it comes to the importance placed on separation from family and friends. I first add the interaction between gender and parental status, and although this interaction term barely reaches significance ($p=.10$), it makes gender significant in the model. Though the effect is slight, it seems that the presence of children at home makes separation from family and friends more important to women than to men. Women with children at home rate the importance of this variable about the same as men who do not have children at home. While the results generally suggest that separation from family and friends can deter both women and men, the effect is exaggerated for women with children at home. I

¹⁰ Descriptive statistics do suggest just that. Women are less likely than men to be married (72.1% vs. 86.4%) and more likely than men to be divorced (12.1% vs. 4.9%).

then add the interaction between gender and marital status; addition of this term makes gender insignificant again but the interaction between gender and parental status slightly more significant as a predictor of influence of separation from family and friends. The interaction between marital status and gender itself is not a significant predictor of this variable.

Table 10: The Influence of Separation from Family and Friends

| Predictor | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Woman | -.076 (.083) | -.473* (.245) | -.412 (.268) |
| Age | .076* (.030) | .073* (.030) | .070* (.031) |
| Children at home | -.185* (.079) | -.547* (.224) | -.576* (.230) |
| Married | -.627*** (.098) | -.621*** (.098) | -.580*** (.123) |
| Woman X Children at home | --- | .300+ (.174) | .319+ (.177) |
| Woman X Married | --- | --- | -.112 (.200) |
| | R2=.074; N=824 | R2=.077; N=824 | R2=.076; N=824 |

Source: Candidate Emergence Study, 1998

Dependent variable: "Please indicate how the following factors would influence your interest in running for the U.S. House. Please answer this question even if you have no interest in running for the U.S. House...separation from friends and family." Response choices: strongly discourage (1), discourage (2), somewhat discourage (3), makes no difference (4), not sure (dropped from analysis).

Note: Gender is coded as 0=man, 1=woman

+ = p < .10; * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001

I turn now to the second family-related variable, the influence of lost personal and family privacy. Again, I expect that women, and especially mothers, should consider this factor more discouraging compared to men. Loss of personal and family privacy seems to be less discouraging overall than the previously considered variable, influence of separation from family and friends. Over a majority of respondents indicate loss of personal and family privacy only somewhat discourages them or makes no difference. 23.7% indicate this factor would discourage them from running for Congress and 14% indicate it would strongly discourage them.

I first display the means on this variable by gender, marital status, and parental status. First, there is no significant difference between women and men, meaning that, contrary to my hypothesis (2), the potential loss of personal and family privacy that comes with a career in Congress affects women and men about the same (Table 11).¹¹ Differences do emerge, however, between married and unmarried respondents and respondents who have children at home versus respondents who do not. Unmarried individuals are less discouraged by privacy loss compared to those who are married. State legislators with children at home are also more discouraged by the privacy loss that comes with a congressional bid compared to individuals who do not have children at home.

Table 11: Influence of loss of personal and family privacy by gender, marital status, and parental status

| Variable | Mean |
|---------------------|------|
| Men | 2.80 |
| Women | 2.75 |
| N | 833 |
| Not married | 3.06 |
| Married*** | 2.74 |
| N | 830 |
| No children at home | 2.88 |
| Children at home** | 2.66 |
| N | 826 |

Source: Candidate Emergence Study, 1998

Dependent variable: "Please indicate how the following factors would influence your interest in running for the U.S. House. Please answer this question even if you have no interest in running for the U.S. House...loss of personal and family privacy." Response choices: strongly discourage (1), discourage (2), somewhat discourage (3), makes no difference (4), not sure (dropped from analysis).

= $p < .01$; *= $p < .001$

¹¹ Even looking at only respondents with minor children at home, women and men have almost identical means on this factor (2.64 vs. 2.66).

I now model the influence of personal and family privacy by including the following predictors: gender, parental status, marital status, and age. Model 1 considers the main effects of these variables. Here, gender, age, and marital status all seem to have some effect on the influence of personal and family privacy on the decision to run for office, while parental status has no effect. Thus, Model 1 suggests that women and married respondents find the loss of personal and family and privacy more discouraging while older people find it less discouraging as a factor that would influence their decision to run for Congress. Two interaction variables—gender x parental status and gender x marital status—did not add explanatory power to the model. Thus, the results suggest that women, regardless of the presence of children at home, consider the loss of personal and family privacy more of an impediment to running for Congress than men. This evidence confirms my expectation that women are more deterred than men by private considerations but disconfirms my hypothesis that mothers of younger children would be even more discouraged (H2). Finally, state legislators who are married, regardless of gender, find loss of privacy more discouraging than their unmarried counterparts.

Table 12: Influence of the loss of personal and family privacy

| Predictor | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Woman | -.151+ (.088) | -.193 (.259) | -.040 (.283) |
| Age | .099** (.032) | .099** (.032) | .091** (.033) |
| Children at home | -.055 (.083) | -.093 (.237) | -.168 (.243) |
| Married | -.400*** (.104) | -.399*** (.104) | -.012 (.307) |
| Woman X Children at home | --- | .032 (.184) | .080 (.187) |
| Woman X Married | --- | --- | -.283 (.211) |
| | R2=.029, n=811 | R2=.028, n=811 | R2=.029, n=811 |

Source: Candidate Emergence Study, 1998

Dependent variable: "Please indicate how the following factors would influence your interest in running for the U.S. House. Please answer this question even if you have no interest in running for the U.S."

House...loss of personal and family privacy.” Response choices: strongly discourage (1), discourage (2), somewhat discourage (3), makes no difference (4), not sure (dropped from analysis).

Note: Gender is coded as 0=man, 1=woman; age is coded as high

Political Ambition

Respondents were asked to rate “the attraction to you personally for a political career” in a series of political offices, including the U.S. House of Representatives. Answer choices ranged from extremely low to extremely high on a seven-point scale. The modal value for this variable is 6, meaning 23.6% of the sample indicated they were highly attracted to a career in the U.S. House of Representatives but the mean is 4.08 which indicates the average respondent answered “toss-up” to this question. Women (M=3.51) are much less likely than to be attracted to the House compared to men (M=4.25) ($p<.000$). Unmarried state legislators (M=4.39) are slightly more likely than married state legislators (4.01) to be attracted to the House ($p<.10$) while legislators with children at home (M=4.56) are much more attracted than those without children at home (M=3.75) ($p<.001$).

As noted previously, Fulton and her colleagues (2006) conceptualize the gender dynamics of political ambition in innovative ways. First, unlike most models of political ambition, Fulton et al. (2006) consider how *personal* costs might factor into the decision-making calculus of potential candidates for Congress. They include a variable for having dependent children at home and also consider how this variable might operate differently for men and women. They also consider several other gender interactions. I build on the Fulton et al. (2006) study by exactly replicating their models (and using the same dataset) but adding other personal costs and gender interactions that I theorize as relevant to political ambition. More specifically, I add how the perceived impact of separation from family and friends might deter political ambition. Given the primacy of family to the lives of women, as well as the social norms of intensive mothering, I hypothesize that mothers will be more strongly deterred by this variable than fathers. I also add additional gender interactions to the model including how party, marital status, and having dependent children at home may affect women and men’s political ambition

differently. My own innovations significantly add to the models of Fulton et al. (2006) by considering different ways that private costs and gender differences contribute to political ambition.

Model 1 (Table 13) replicates Fulton et al.'s model of attraction to the U.S. House of Representatives, but also includes the separation from family and friends variable. I find that this variable does indeed contribute to explaining political ambition, as respondents who find separation to be less discouraging are more politically ambitious compared to respondents who indicate separation would more strongly discourage them from running. As in other studies of political ambition, including Fulton et al., perceived benefits (e.g. chances of winning) and perceived costs (e.g. difficulty of winning) contribute to explaining state legislators' attraction to a career in the U.S. House of Representatives. Gender is also a significant independent variable and the sign is negative which indicates women are less politically ambitious than men. Age also contributes to the explanation with older state legislators being far less likely than younger state legislators to be attracted to the House. Surprisingly, marital status and the presence of children in the household do not significantly relate to state legislators' political ambition. Thus, the most interesting results for the purposes of the present study so far are that gender and separation from family and friends are indeed important pieces of the puzzle in explaining political ambition.

The second model builds on the first in that it adds interaction effects that might explain state legislators' attraction to the House. I interact gender with separation from family and friends, party, marital status, and presence of children in the household. Contrary to my hypothesis, men and women are not affected differently by the separation from friends and family variable, as the interaction is not significant. Further, the gender interactions with party and marital status are also insignificant, results that again run against expectations. Gender does interact with having children at home, however, and this result was expected. That is, while having children at home decreases political ambition for women, it *increases* ambition for men. I interpret this result in the same way that Fulton et al. (2006) do:

Children tend to enhance parents' social networks (e.g., PTA, little league, etc.) and provides them greater visibility in the community. Nevertheless, while such community ties might foster men's congressional ambitions, the child-care responsibilities that women often disproportionately bear at home likely mitigate the positive influence of social networks on women's ambitions for Congress (241).

Interestingly but not surprisingly, gender is not significant in the second model, which suggests that much of the original difference in ambition between men and women might in fact be accounted for in the interaction effect of gender x presence of children.

Table 13
Congressional Ambition

| | | Model 1 | Model 2 | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|-------------------|-----------------|
| Long-term Electoral Prospects | Chances of Winning, Future | .164*** (.028) | .165*** (.028) | |
| Attitudes | Personal Motivations | .276*** (.075) | .276*** (.075) | |
| Assessments of Institution | Relative Effectiveness and Prestige of House | .110* (.049) | .097* (.049) | |
| Political Costs | Political Costs | .177 (.160) | .184 (.160) | |
| Career Opportunity Costs | Difficulty of Winning State Legislative Seat | .104* (.050) | .107* (.050) | |
| | Term-Limited | .211 (.172) | .190 (.172) | |
| | Value of State Legislative Seat | .079 (.100) | .091 (.100) | |
| Personal Costs | Married | .251 (.242) | .516 (.695) | |
| | Children in Household | .202 (.178) | 1.320* (.536) | |
| | Separation from family and friends | .252** (.090) | .082 (.262) | |
| Recruitment | Recruitment | .254*** (.055) | .252*** (.055) | |
| Gender | Female | -.493** (.207) | -.319 (.817) | |
| | Seniority | -.022 (.052) | -.026 (.052) | |
| Controls | Age | -.357*** (.081) | .359*** (.083) | |
| | State Legislative Professionalism | -.037 (.058) | -.048 (.058) | |
| | Education | .140 (.092) | .120 (.092) | |
| | Income | -.022 (.056) | -.019 (.056) | |
| | White | -.253 (.337) | -.168 (.338) | |
| | Republican | -.029 (.030) | -.015 (.093) | |
| | Interactions | Separation from family and friends X Gender | | .138 (.503) |
| | | Party X Gender | | -.011 (.076) |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|------|---------|
| Married X Gender | | -0.215 |
| | | (.499) |
| Children in Household X Gender | | -0.963* |
| | | (.417) |
| Pseudo R2 | .370 | .375 |
| Total N | 492 | 492 |

The evidence above indicates a few things: one, separation from family and friends (a personal cost) is an important determinant of political ambition for both women and men yet this “cost” is rarely considered in the literature. Scholars would do well to consider how private commitments indeed affect public choices. Secondly, gender has an important, independent effect on Congressional ambition with women being less politically ambitious than men overall, *but only when the interactive effect of gender with children in the household is unaccounted for*. This finding indicates that much of the gender disparity in political ambition can be explained by parental status. The difference is this—while the presence of minor children is an asset for men in terms of political ambition, it is a constraint for women. Parental status carries different meanings and consequences for men and women when it comes to their political ambitions, in ways that are almost completely opposite. Much of this can be attributed to simple sexual divisions of labor—while children to women mean more work and responsibilities, children to men mean more opportunities for networking and establishing a presence in their community.

Summary of Key Findings

| Variable | CAWP Data | CES Data |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Family composition | <p>Women are less likely than men to have minor children and women have older children than men; these differences transcend party with the exception that while Democratic women have older children than their male counterparts, Republican men and women do not differ in average age of their youngest child.</p> | <p>Women are less likely than men to have minor children and three times less likely to have very young children (under age 6).</p> |
| Private considerations | <p><i>Children being old enough to feel comfortable:</i> While this factor is considerably important to both men and women, women are much more likely to ascribe importance to this variable compared to their male counterparts. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to rate this consideration as important and Republican women are the most constrained by this factor.</p> <p><i>Approval of spouse:</i> This factor is important to both men and women and no significant gender differences emerge. Republicans care more about the approval of their spouse than Democrats.</p> | <p><i>Separation from family and friends:</i> Almost half of both men and women find this consideration discouraging to a congressional bid and no gender differences emerge. Legislators with children at home and who are married find this consideration more discouraging compared to their counterparts, and women with children at home are especially discouraged, as the gender interaction is significant.</p> <p><i>Loss of privacy:</i> This consideration is predicted mostly by marital status and age, with married people and younger people being more discouraged from running for Congress because of privacy loss. Gender and children at home are less significant to this consideration.</p> |
| Political Ambition | <p>No differences by gender or parental status emerge.</p> | <p>Having children at home lowers women's political ambition but increases men. Separation from friends and family predicts lower political ambition in both men and women. Marital status is insignificant.</p> |

Discussion/Conclusions

The story for how gender and parenthood figure into potential candidates' calculations for a congressional bid is complex. Simply put, the effects of gender and parental status on political ambition are complicated and contingent. Moreover, the effects of these variables cannot be fully understood without considering their indirect effects on political ambition, through important intervening variables like private considerations (e.g. influence of separation from family and friends). My results suggest that political ambition scholars who neglect to consider how gender, parenthood, and private considerations affect political ambition are missing a key part of the story. Who you and your family are (gender, parental status) and what you think about certain private/family considerations strongly influence decisions surrounding political candidacy for Congress.

Some evidence indicates that party identification complicates the relationship among gender, parenthood, and political ambition, as Republicans were more likely to ascribe importance to private considerations such as the approval of their spouse or partner and their children being old enough, with Republican *women* being the most constrained by the latter variable. This finding provides some support for the hypothesis that motherhood is more of a liability for Republican rather than Democratic women. Republican women are likely more constrained by gender norms that place high importance on the role of mothers and preservation of the nuclear family. While these norms did not stop Republican women from ultimately running for state legislature, they may have weighed heavily in their considerations about running.

The results also suggest that not only does parental status matter, but marital status matters as well. Time and time again, the results showed that married state legislators faced more constraints than their unmarried counterparts. Married state legislators are more discouraged by private considerations that influence their decision to run for Congress, including separation from family and friends and the loss of personal and family privacy. However, while difference of means tests indicated that married

people are less politically ambitious compared to their unmarried counterparts, marital status was not significant when controlling for other factors. It is also important to note that the CAWP data showed that approval of one's spouse or partner was actually a more important consideration than children being old enough, which suggests that for both men and women, having one's spouse on board with one's political inclinations heavily influences the decision to run for office.

It is important to repeat that the datasets I used to capture the relationships among gender, parenthood, and political ambition use samples of state legislators, who have already run for and held office. This means that the individuals I have studied have successfully navigated and negotiated the constraints that may be associated with their parental status. As stated above, I do believe that running and serving in the state legislature is quite unlike a bid for and seat in Congress in that the time demands and public scrutiny involved in a congressional bid and career make it so that parenthood becomes all the more salient, especially for women. That is, candidates who run for Congress face exaggerated constraints of parenthood. This makes the findings in this paper the result of a "most likely case" which means that I might have measured the constraints of parenthood at their highest. Additionally, state legislators—by virtue of already entering the political world—are a distinct group that are arguably very different from the men and women who have never run for political office. Future research should explore the relationships among gender, parenthood, and political ambition among individuals who have yet to run for office. Lawless and Fox (2011) conducted such an analysis that, using a sample of "eligible candidates,"¹² found that marital status, parental status, and traditional family structures did not impede women from considering a run for political office. Based on their findings, the researchers make a rather strong claim that as an answer for why more women do not emerge as candidates, "the 'family' explanation carries intuitive appeal, but no explanatory power" (Lawless and Fox 2011, 23). The nature of Lawless and Fox's sample, however, may underestimate the effect of family

¹² Eligible candidates include individuals who are situated in careers that often precede political bids (law, business, education, and political activism), but who have not held political office before.

roles and responsibilities on political ambition. People who have never been political candidates nor had political careers may be acutely unaware of what it takes to combine parenthood and politics, and what the consequences of such a decision really are. State legislators, in contrast, are cognizant of what it means to balance both roles—from time balance dilemma considerations to perceptions of role violations. These considerations, based on experience, may dissuade them from running for an even higher office in which the constraints associated with parenthood are even more exaggerated and perhaps detrimental. Thus, family considerations may be peripheral to eligible candidates' considerations when considering political candidacy, but evidence from my analysis indicates that it is far too soon to conclude that family roles are no longer a formidable barrier to the emergence of women as candidates for Congress.

In sum, gender affects political ambition through a path of personal decisions, considerations and attitudes: political men and women have different family compositions (women are far less likely to have minor children and are more likely to have older children), they place more or less importance on private considerations that affect political ambition (women care more about the age of their children), and are affected differently by the presence of minor children (women with children at home are less politically ambitious while men with minor children are more ambitious). These differences add up to the general conclusion that (partly) because of different family structures and attitudes toward family, women are less politically ambitious than men. To be sure, other variables like marital status and party, also matter and are an important part of the story. Going forward, future research might tease apart the “why” part of the tale—what specifically is it about parenthood that motivates men or hinders the emergence of women candidates?

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Appendix

Candidate Emergence Study

The Candidate Emergence Study (CES) data used in this study is part of a larger study of potential candidates' decisions to run for Congress conducted by principal investigators L. Sandy Maisel (Colby College), Walter J. Stone (University of California, Davis), and Cherie D. Maestas (Florida State University). Surveys were mailed to state legislators in 1998 from a random sample of 200 of the 435

congressional districts. 2715 total state legislators were sampled and 875 responded, for a response rate of about 32%.

Center for American Women and Politics 2008 Routes to Office Study

In 2008, the Center for American Women in Politics (CAWP) conducted the “2008 Routes to Office Study,” with principal investigators Kira Sanbonmatsu, Susan J. Carroll, and Debbie Walsh (Rutgers University). Surveys were mailed to state legislators in all 50 states and the sample included the population of women state senators (n=423), the population of women state representatives (n=1314), a random sample of men state senators, stratified by state and sampled in proportion to the number of women from each state in the population of women state senators (n=423), and a random sample of men state representatives (n=1314), stratified by state and sampled in proportion to the number of women from each state in the population of women state representatives. 1268 legislators completed the survey for a response rate of 36.5%.

Table: CES Data: Means on each factor that could discourage running for office

| Factor | Men | Women |
|--|------|-------|
| Separation from family and friends | 2.51 | 2.56 |
| Lost personal and family privacy | 2.80 | 2.75 |
| Negative impact on political career if lost election | 3.52 | 3.54 |
| Loss of leisure time | 3.12 | 3.05 |
| Enduring negative advertising attacks** | 2.95 | 2.71 |
| Needing to raise large amount of money* | 2.10 | 1.92 |
| Losing income | 3.34 | 3.41 |
| Lack of assistance from political party** | 3.57 | 3.49 |
| Possibility of serving in the minority party | 3.57 | 3.49 |
| Having to give up current career | 3.33 | 3.44 |

+ = p < .10; * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001

Table: CAWP Data: Means on each factor that could affect decision to run for state legislature

| Factor | Men | Women |
|--|------|-------|
| Financial resources* | 1.83 | 1.74 |
| Approval of spouse or partner* | 1.21 | 1.28 |
| Children being old enough*** | 1.61 | 1.33 |
| Building prior experience | 2.30 | 2.25 |
| Flexible occupation | 1.46 | 1.47 |
| Feeling capable*** | 1.57 | 1.39 |
| Contacts for career | 2.78 | 2.73 |
| Perception of office as stepping stone** | 2.79 | 2.87 |
| Policy issues*** | 1.91 | 1.68 |
| Longstanding desire to run*** | 2.12 | 2.37 |

| | | |
|------------------------------|------|------|
| Candidate training*** | 2.77 | 2.62 |
| Can handle public scrutiny** | 1.85 | 1.73 |
| Party support*** | 1.97 | 1.83 |

Below are various factors that have been suggested to be important in influencing decisions to run for office. Please indicate how important each factor was in affecting your decision to run the first time for the office you now hold. 1=very important, 2=somewhat important, 3=not important
 +=p<.10; *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001

Table: Differences in Ambition by Gender and Parental Status

| Gender | Minor children | No minor children |
|--------|----------------|-------------------|
| Men | 82.1% | 51.1% |
| Women | 82.3% | 50.3% |
| N | 219 | 994 |

The dependent variable was operationalized as an affirmative answer to this question: “If you had the necessary political support and the right opportunities, are there other elective or appointive political offices at any level of government that you would eventually like to hold?” Although no gender differences in ambition emerge among men and women who have minor children and those that do not, it does seem that parental status has an independent effect on political ambition, but regardless of gender. State legislators with minor children are far more likely to say they would like to seek another political position compared to those with no minor children. This result may be related to age of the state legislator—those with minor children are likely younger than those with grown children, and may hold more political ambitions for the future.