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Reconciling Family Roles With Political Ambition: The New Normal For Women In Twenty-First Century U.S. Politics

Richard L. Fox
Loyola Marymount University, richard.fox@lmu.edu

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Richard L. Fox Loyola Marymount University
Jennifer L. Lawless American University

Based on data from the 2011 Citizen Political Ambition Study—a national survey of nearly 4,000 "potential candidates" for all levels of office—we provide the first thorough analysis of the manner in which traditional family arrangements affect the initial decision to run for office. Our findings reveal that traditional family dynamics do not account for the gender gap in political ambition. Neither marital and parental status, nor the division of labor pertaining to household tasks and child care, predicts potential candidates' political ambition. This is not to downplay the fact that the gender gap in political ambition remains substantial and static or that traditional family roles affect whether women make it into the candidate eligibility pool in the first place. But it is to suggest that family arrangements are not a primary factor explaining why female potential candidates exhibit lower levels of political ambition than do men. Because women remain less likely than men to exhibit political ambition even in the face of stringent controls, the lack of explanatory power conferred by family arrangements highlights that other barriers to women's emergence as candidates clearly merit continued investigation.

When the 113th Congress convened in January 2013, 81% of its members were men. Men occupy the governor's mansion in 45 of the 50 states, and they run City Hall in 88 of the 100 largest cities across the country.[1] At least as important as women's continued underrepresentation in U.S. politics is evidence that points to stagnation in the number of female office holders. Whereas the 1980s and early 1990s saw gradual increases in the number of women seeking elective office, the last several election cycles represent a plateau in the number of female candidates and elected officials at both the federal and state levels. The 2010 congressional elections actually resulted in the first net decrease in the number of women serving in the U.S. House since the 1978 midterm elections.

Women's numeric underrepresentation is striking because, in the contemporary electoral environment, female candidates tend to fare at least as well as their male counterparts, both in terms of vote totals and dollars raised (e.g., Fox 2010; Lawless and Pearson 2008; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997). Given this paradox, political scientists offer four central explanations to account for women's slow climb into public office. First, women are relatively new entrants into the political pipeline; they have not traditionally worked in the professions that lead to political careers, so they have been slow to acquire the credentials most candidates possess (Conway, Ahern, and Steuernagel 2004; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). Second, structural barriers, most notably the incumbency advantage, inhibit electoral opportunities and limit the pace at which previously excluded groups can make gains (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). Third, electoral gatekeepers tap women to run for office less frequently than men (Niven 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2006). Finally, a gender gap in political ambition, even among educated, well-credentialed professionals, depresses women's interest in running for office and emerging as candidates (Lawless and Fox 2010).

A broad, systemic dynamic that undergirds each of these explanations for women's underrepresentation is an assumption about the power of traditional family arrangements. The pace at which women can turn their professional credentials into candidacies—and seize the rare open-seat opportunities that arise—may be influenced by the ease with which they can reconcile their competing professional and private sphere demands. Further, traditional conceptions of women's roles may deter gatekeepers from recruiting women with children to engage in arduous campaign activities, thereby aggravating already-gendered patterns of recruitment. And these family roles and responsibilities may affect whether women have the flexibility even to consider running for office, a critical precursor to an eventual candidacy. The conventional wisdom, therefore, has converged on the premise that traditional family-role orientations serve as significant impediments to women's candidate emergence. Indeed, gender and politics textbooks regularly conclude that women's absence from high-level electoral politics is linked to their family roles (e.g., Conway, Ahern, and Steuernagel 2004; Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2010).

Despite its intuitive appeal, we argue that this conventional wisdom regarding the relationship between family and women's political ambition needs to be revisited. Throughout the past 30 years, women have emerged as trailblazers whose professional success was contingent on learning how to balance high-level careers with traditional gender roles. Moreover, the few studies that establish a link between family roles and political ambition tend to focus on candidates and elected officials, all of whom, by virtue of the fact that they decided to run for office, did not perceive family arrangements as a barrier sufficient to preclude an eventual candidacy (e.g., Burt-Way and Kelly 1992; Fox 1997; Fulton et al. 2006; Gaddie 2004). The one exception is our 2001 survey of potential candidates, in which we examine directly the manner in which family roles and responsibilities affect the decision to run for office (Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010). But our findings are inconclusive. We uncover anecdotal support for the claim that traditional family arrangements hamper women's political ambition, but our limited quantitative analysis suggests otherwise. Because the relationship between family roles and political ambition was not the primary focus of our previous work, we neither delved into the inconsistencies between the survey data and qualitative evidence nor fully engaged the possibility that traditional family arrangements may not hamper female potential candidates' ambition.

In this article, we challenge the long-standing assumption that family roles deter women's emergence from the pool of eligible candidates. We rely on data from the 2011 Citizen Political Ambition Study—a national survey of nearly 4,000 "potential candidates" for all levels of office—to provide the first thorough analysis of the manner in which family arrangements affect the initial decision to run for office. Our findings reveal that traditional family dynamics do not account for the gender gap in political ambition. Neither marital and parental status nor the division of labor pertaining to household tasks and child care predicts political ambition. Further, traditional family arrangements do not influence patterns of political recruitment or potential candidates' self-evaluations of their qualifications to run for office. Finally, there are no gender differences in how family structures and roles affect potential candidates' assessments of the feasibility of pursuing a political career. This is not to downplay the fact that the gender gap in political ambition remains substantial and static or that traditional family roles affect whether women make it into the candidate eligibility pool in the first place. But family arrangements are not a primary factor explaining why female potential candidates exhibit lower levels of political ambition than do men. Because women remain less likely than men to exhibit interest in running for office even in the face of stringent controls, the lack of explanatory power conferred by family arrangements highlights that other barriers to women's emergence as candidates clearly merit continued investigation.

Gender Roles and Political Ambition

Existing Literature and the Conventional Wisdom

Up through the mid-twentieth century, the notion of women serving in elective office was anathema, largely because of the expectation that women should prioritize family and child care. By the 1960s, though, the façade of gendered public and private spheres began to crumble, and private sphere issues, such as child care and domestic abuse, became part of public-sphere policy debates. Moreover, women began to seize professional opportunities previously reserved for men. Yet the promise of egalitarian household and parenting dynamics never fully materialized. Rather, as women began to enter the public sphere—both professionally and politically—they often faced a "double bind" (Jamieson 1995). Women who ventured out of the "proper sphere" found themselves in a catch-22: if they achieved professional success, then they were

perceived to be neglecting their womanly duties; if they failed professionally, then they were wrong to attempt entering the public domain in the first place. Essentially, professional women were constantly judged not only by how they managed their careers, but also by how well they performed the duties of a wife and mother.

Conclusions drawn from broad empirical studies of candidates and elected officials tend to corroborate theoretical discussions pertaining to the intersection of family roles and women in politics. In one of the earliest pieces of research about the relationship between family arrangements and political ambition, Sapiro (1982, 270) found that, among national convention delegates, both women and men felt conflict between their political aspirations and caring for their children. The restraints were far greater for women than men, though, and as a result, women tended to delay their entry into the political arena until their family responsibilities abated. Studies of candidates and elected officials throughout the course of the 25 years following Sapiro's study uncovered similar results. Among elected officials, Gaddie (2004) finds that women and men often mention the balancing act involved in reconciling a career, a family, and political ambition, but women appear to shoulder more of the burden than men. Indeed, female state legislators continue to be primarily responsible for housework and child care even after they are elected to public office (Thomas 2002). These child-care responsibilities make a career in the U.S. House of Representatives less attractive to female state legislators (Fulton et al. 2006). Evidence from in-depth studies of congressional candidates also points to women being more likely than men to express concern with family responsibilities when making decisions about pursuing elective office (Fox 1997; see also Burt-Way and Kelly 1992).

Similar patterns are evident among a pool of potential candidates. The data presented in Table 1 reveal that, among our 2011 sample of lawyers, business leaders, educators, and political activists, female potential candidates are significantly more likely than men to eschew traditional family arrangements. More specifically, women are roughly twice as likely as men to be single or divorced, and they are 10 percentage points less likely than professionally similar men to have children. This might reflect that being a wife or mother can serve as an impediment to professional achievement, a goal that women in the sample already attained. Those women who are married and who do have children, however, tend to exhibit traditional gender role orientations. In families where both adults are working (generally in high-level or full-time careers), women are roughly six times more likely than men to bear responsibility for the majority of household tasks, and they are about 10 times more likely to be the primary child-care provider (see bottom of Table 1). This division of household labor is consistent across political party lines.[2]

Table 1 Eligible Candidates' Family Structures, Roles, and Responsibilities

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Marital Status		
Single	15**	8
Married or living with partner	72**	86
Separated or divorced	13**	6
Parental Status		
Has children	73**	83
Has children living at home	41**	45
Has children under age 7 living at home	15	15
Household Responsibilities		
Responsible for majority of household tasks	43**	7
Equal division of labor	45**	41
Spouse/partner responsible for majority of household tasks	12**	52
Childcare Responsibilities		
Responsible for majority of child care	60**	6
Equal division of child care	35**	40
Spouse/partner responsible for majority of child care	6**	54
N	1,766	1,848

Note: The household tasks data do not include respondents who are not married or living with a partner; and the child care arrangements data do not include respondents who do not have children. Significance levels of chi-square test comparing women and men: $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$.

The data also indicate a substantial gender gap in political ambition. Men are approximately 55% more likely than women to have run for office, and among those who have not yet entered an actual race, men are roughly 30% more likely than women to have considered a candidacy (see Table 2). Women are 45% more likely than men never to have thought about running for office.[3] Women are also significantly less likely than men to express interest in running

[2]Democratic and Republican women are roughly equally likely to be single, have young children living at home, and report responsibility for most of the household tasks and child care.

[3]The proportion of respondents who considered running for office differs by profession (lawyers and political activists are most likely to have thought about it), but the gender gap at the aggregate level is approximately the same size as the gap within each profession. Thus, we pool the data. Each of the models we discuss, however, withstands fixed effects for professional subgroups.

TABLE 2 The Gender Gap in Political Ambition

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Sought or Has Considered Running for Office		
Ran for office	9**	14
Seriously considered running	6*	9
Considered running	31**	39
Never thought about running	55**	38
Interest in Running for Office in the Future		
Definitely	5*	8
If the opportunity presented itself	9**	14
No interest now, but wouldn't rule it out forever	45**	49
It is something I would absolutely never do	41**	29
Concrete Steps that Precede a Candidacy		
Spoke with party leaders about running	25**	32
Discussed running with family and friends	27**	38
Discussed financial contributions with supporters	14**	20
Investigated how to get name on the ballot	13**	21
Spoke with candidates about their experiences	29**	38
Attended a candidate training session	9	11
N	1,766	1,848

Note: Significance levels of chi-square test comparing women and men: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

for office in the future. And with the exception of attending a candidate training, men are at least 28% more likely than women to have engaged in any of the steps that typically precede a political campaign.[4]

In light of empirical evidence gathered from actual female candidates and elected officials and trends in potential candidates' household arrangements and political ambition, it is understandable that political scientists accept the notion that traditional family roles impede women's interest in running for office.

Theoretical and Empirical Limitations

We argue, however, that the conclusion that women's family roles hamper their political ambition is both theoretically limited and borne out of empirical analyses that are not suited to assess the extent to which family arrangements actually affect candidate emergence. Turning first to methodological issues, the prevailing wisdom derives almost exclusively from studies of actual candidates or elected officials, all of whom exhibited political ambition, regardless of their family structures or roles. Further, a great deal of the evidence is based on samples of female candidates drawn from the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, this body of research is limited in what it can say about the impact of family arrangements, or the differential effects they might exert, on political ambition in contemporary politics. This is not to diminish the findings from these studies; many female candidates and elected officials reference their family roles as making their political careers more difficult and complex, or affecting the timing with which they pursued a candidacy. But in none of these cases did traditional family arrangements prevent women's eventual candidate emergence.

More importantly, to conclude that family arrangements substantially stunt women's political ambition is to ignore the reality that the difficult balancing act women face has evolved into a norm for high-level professional women. Although women's full integration into the pipeline professions, especially at the highest echelons, will take decades, recent data on career patterns indicate that women are moving swiftly into the professions from which most candidates yield. Almost 35% of practicing lawyers are women (NALP 2009). More than 50% of those working in managerial and professional specialty occupations in business are women (Catalyst 2013). Similar trends are evident as women move into top positions in secondary education, the professoriate, and college and university administrations. Given that divisions in family roles and household responsibilities remain strikingly gendered, women who embark on careers in law, business, education, and politics have become accustomed to the challenges of the balancing act.

[4]The gender gaps in considering a candidacy, expressing interest in running for office in the future, and taking concrete steps that precede a campaign are roughly the same size for Democrats and Republicans. The party gap is never statistically significant.

In fact, a substantial, multidisciplinary literature assesses the challenges of the work/family balance for professional women and draws conclusions about the best ways for women with families to succeed (e.g., Halpern and Cheung 2008; van Steenbergen, Ellemers, and Mooijaart 2007). A 2008 review of academic literature pertaining to balancing family life with professional goals and responsibilities identifies more than 150 studies that address the types of programs and policies that work best to ameliorate these challenging circumstances (Kelly et al. 2008). The mere existence of this burgeoning literature is a testament to the fact that the double bind is a regular aspect of women's participation in the workforce. In other words, women in the political pipeline have learned to balance these dual roles and reconcile being the primary caretaker of the home and children with their ambition to become lawyers, executives, school principals, professors, and heads of political organizations. If family roles were going to hold them back professionally, then women in the political pipeline would have already been stymied.

Of course, we recognize that the perpetuation of traditional family arrangements can affect women's career choices before they enter the candidate eligibility pool. A survey of corporate women found that the majority are not satisfied with the balancing act, so many take off several years to raise a family or pursue more "family friendly" work (McKenzie 2004). Indeed, occupational trends in the fields of law, education, and business demonstrate that, for family reasons, many women "opt out" of the professional pipeline from which most candidates emerge (Belkin 2003; Hirshman 2006).[5] But it is from this candidate eligibility pool that the majority of state legislative and congressional candidates—male and female, Democrat and Republican—emerge (Manning 2013). Thus, an assessment of the extent to which family roles affect potential candidates' political ambition must focus on women and men in these pipeline professions.

Hypotheses

Ultimately, we argue that the last few decades have experienced a normalization of professional women balancing successful careers with traditional family roles. Traditional gender roles might not be fair, and they may make women's lives more challenging, but that does not mean that family roles impede women in the candidate eligibility pool from expressing interest in running for office. Indeed, we view the consideration of a candidacy the first step of the candidate emergence process. That is, a distinct, yet vitally important phase of the development of political ambition occurs well before the actual decision to enter a specific race ever transpires. If the notion of a candidacy has never even crossed an individual's mind, then he or she never actually decides whether to enter a particular race at particular time. Running for office does not even appear on their radar screen. The importance of this distinct stage of the process is well established in the literature and is especially relevant for our inquiry because it is at this stage of the candidate emergence process that the gender gap in ambition is the largest (see Carroll 2003; Gaddie 2004; Lawless and Fox 2010; Sanbonmatsu 2002). Thus, in testing the proposition that traditional family roles do not contribute to the gender gap in political ambition, we operationalize two hypotheses that focus primarily on this earlier stage of the candidate emergence process:

> *H1 (No Direct-Effects Hypothesis):* Traditional family roles and responsibilities will not depress female potential candidates' interest in running for office or depress their likelihood of ultimately declaring a candidacy.
>
> *H2 (No Indirect-Effects Hypothesis):* Traditional family roles and responsibilities will not reduce women's political ambition by working through critical predictors of interest in running for office, such as recruitment, qualifications to run, or political activism.

Our analysis allows for a nuanced assessment of the long-held assumption that traditional family arrangements contribute to the gender gap in potential candidates' political ambition. This endeavor is long overdue and key to gauging prospects for women's full integration into U.S. politics.

Research Design and Dataset: The 2011 Citizen Political Ambition Study

We rely on data from the 2011 Citizen Political Ambition Study—a national survey of a random sample of equally credentialed women and men who are well-positioned to serve as future candidates for all elective offices—to examine the relationship

[5]This decision may occur more often among conservative women. The disproportionate ratio of Democratic to Republican female office holders, therefore, may have less to do with party differences in ambition among potential candidates and more to do with the partisan breakdown of women who sustain a presence in the pipeline professions.

between potential candidates' family arrangements and their interest in running for office. We drew our "candidate eligibility pool" from the professions that yield the highest proportion of male and female congressional and state legislative candidates: law, business, education, and politics (Manning 2013). We disproportionately stratified by sex so that the sample would include roughly equal numbers of women and men (see online Appendix A for a description of the research design).

We administered by mail and email a survey to 9,000 individuals in the four pipeline professions. The survey asked respondents about their sociodemographic backgrounds, political activism, political outlook, political experiences, and willingness to run for office. We also included questions about family arrangements, roles, and responsibilities, as well as about how potential candidates spend their day and the flexibility they perceive to enter the electoral arena. The in-depth nature of the questions pertaining to family roles and our ability to link them to measures of political ambition represent a significant advance over previous surveys of potential candidates.

Our results are based on survey responses from 3,768 potential candidates (1,925 men and 1,843 women). After taking into account undeliverable surveys, this represents a 51% response rate. No remarkable sociodemographic or professional differences distinguish the men from the women. Table 3, which presents a description of our sample, reveals no gender differences in race, income, education, or region. Women and men also hold similar employment roles, degrees of professional success, and levels of political interest and participation. And women and men were equally likely to complete the survey and took nearly identical amounts of time to return it, so it is unlikely that family roles and responsibilities affected women's propensity to respond to the questionnaire.

It is important to note two statistically significant gender differences, though. Women are more likely to be Democrats, while men are more likely to be Republicans and independents. Further, women in the sample are, on average, three years younger than men, a probable result of women's relatively recent entry into the fields of law and business. Our empirical analyses are sensitive to these differences and control for them. Overall, our "eligibility pool approach" and sample allow us to offer a detailed examination of the manner in which family affects interest in running for all levels and types of political office, either now or in the future.

TABLE 3 The Citizen Political Ambition Study Sample Demographics (2011)

	Overall Sample (%)	Male Respondents (%)	Female Respondents (%)
Party Affiliation			
Democrat	43	37	49
Independent	31	34	28
Republican	26	29	24
Race			
White	83	84	81
Black	6	6	7
Latino/Hispanic	7	7	7
Other	4	4	5
Education			
No college degree	9	7	10
Bachelor's degree	23	23	22
Graduate degree	69	70	68
Household Income			
< $50,000	6	5	6
$50,001–$75,000	10	9	11
$75,001–$100,000	15	16	14
$100,001–200,000	35	34	36
> $200,000	35	36	33
Profession			
Law	26	26	26
Business	19	20	17
Education	28	28	28
Politics	28	26	29
Mean Age (Years)	52	53	50
N	3,614	1,848	1,766

Note: Number of cases varies slightly, as some respondents omitted answers to some questions. Independents include partisan leaners, 13% of whom lean Democratic and 10% of whom lean Republican.

Findings and Analysis

The Direct Effects of Traditional Family Arrangements on Political Ambition

The perpetuation of traditional family roles within our sample is important because it demonstrates that women and men who are similarly situated professionally are not similarly situated at home (see Table 1). As articulated in the *No Direct-Effects Hypothesis*, however, we do not expect these disparities to hinder women's interest in entering the electoral arena. Consistent with our hypothesis, the data reveal that, across a broad range of model specifications, family structures and roles do not directly affect potential candidates' political ambition.

Table 4 presents a series of models that explore the relationship between traditional family roles and political ambition. In each model, we predict whether a respondent ever considered running for office. We include as explanatory variables the respondent's sex as well as measures of family structures, including marital and parental status (see online Appendix B for a description of the variables and their coding). We also include gauges of whether the respondent is responsible for the majority of the household tasks and/or child care, as well as the total number of hours per week respondents report engaging in these tasks. And we include a measure of what we might consider the most demanding family dynamics amid which a respondent could live: whether the respondent is married with children and responsible for the majority of the household and child-care duties. Because some of these variables are correlated, we performed the analysis by including each family-related variable on its own. We then ran a fully specified model that included the variables together.

The results indicate that women are significantly less likely than men ever to have considered running for office. But no measure of family structures or roles achieves conventional levels of statistical significance in depressing political ambition. The only significant finding works in the opposite direction; respondents with children under the age of seven are more likely to have considered running for office. These results hold when we interact the sex of the respondent with the family structure and role variables (see model 12), as well as when we include each interaction term separately in the fully specified model. In general, female and male potential candidates are equally likely *not* to factor family arrangements into the calculus by which they consider a candidacy.[6]

The finding that traditional family structures and roles are not linked to interest in running for office is not an artifact of women having considered entering the electoral arena before they achieved professional success and acquired familial responsibilities. Among respondents who considered running for office, 38% of women, compared to 27% of men, report that the thought first occurred to them after they were established professionally (gender difference significant at $p < .05$) and, often, after they had already begun their families. On the other hand, 52% of men, compared to 42% of women, who considered a candidacy first did so either as children or in college or graduate school (gender difference significant at $p < .05$). Further, women who considered running for office are just as likely as men to report that they most recently thought about it within the last three years (57% of women, compared to 56% of men). This is the case even for respondents with children under the age of seven.

The absence of a direct, negative relationship between family arrangements and political ambition persists when we control for a series of sociodemographic and political measures that are important predictors of the initial decision to run for office.[7] The first column in Table 5 presents logistic regression coefficients from an equation that predicts whether a respondent ever considered running for office. Consistent with previous work on the initial decision to run for office, our results indicate that sex remains a statistically significant predictor of retrospective interest in running for office. All else equal, women are nearly 14 percentage points less likely than similarly situated men ever to have considered a candidacy (0.48 predicted probability, compared to 0.61).[8] Beyond sex, the model reveals that recruitment to run for office, a respondent's self-perceived qualifications to enter the electoral fray, and prior levels of political participation serve as important predictors of political ambition. Notably, however, with the exception of having children under the age of seven, none of the family structures or roles variables approaches conventional levels of statistical significance (and as was the case without the baseline controls, young children correspond with an increased likelihood that a respondent has considered running for office).

Further, family structures and roles do not affect women and men differently. Here and throughout the remainder of this article, the multivariate results hold when we perform the analyses separately on women and men (see Table A-1), as well as when we interact sex with the family structure and roles variables individually and together in the fully specified models

[6]When we restrict the analysis to each professional subsample, the family-arrangements variables behave similarly. These similarities across profession indicate that professional stature does not seem to affect whether women have figured out how to manage their dual roles. Our educator and activist subsamples, after all, have lower incomes and, accordingly, less flexibility regarding how to delegate household responsibilities and child care. Yet the evidence suggests that family arrangements do not affect political ambition regardless of career status.

[7]The models predicting ambition, recruitment, and qualifications are well-established in the literature (Fulton et al. 2006; Lawless and Fox 2010; Niederle and Vesterlund 2007).

[8]All predicted probabilities are calculated by holding continuous independent variables at their means and dummy variables at their modes.

TABLE 4 The Impact of Family Structures and Roles on Political Ambition: Logistic Regression Coefficients (and standard errors) Predicting Whether Respondent Ever Considered Running for Office

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Sex (female)	-.67**	-.66**	-.67**	-.67**	-.68**	-.68**	-.71**	-.72**	-.69**	-.68**	-.69**	-.57**
	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.19)
Married		.10									.11	.03
		(.09)									(.09)	(.15)
Children			.05								-.03	.08
			(.08)								(.10)	(.15)
Children living at home				.01							-13	-.01
				(.08)							(.09)	(.12)
Children under age 7					.29**						.36**	.40**
					(.10)						(.11)	(.16)
Responsible for majority of household tasks						.01					-.08	-.00
						(.09)					(.10)	(.19)
Responsible for majority of child care							.11				.14	-08
							(.09)				(.10)	(.25)
Most demanding family arrangements								.15				
								(.09)				
Hours spent (per day) on household tasks									.06			
									(.03)			
Hours spent (per day) on child care										-.01		
										(.01)		
Female * Married												.13
												(.19)
Female * Children												-.18
												(.21)
Female * Children living at home												-.25
												(.18)
Female * Children under age 7												-.08
												(.22)
Female * Majority of household tasks												-.08
												(.22)
Female * Majority of child care												.31
												(.28)
Constant	.47**	.39**	.44**	.47**	.44**	.47**	.47**	.46**	.38**	.47**	.42**	.35*
	(.05)	(.09)	(.08)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.07)	(.06)	(.10)	(.15)
Pseudo-R^2	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04
Percent correctly predicted	58.4	58.3	58.4	58.3	58.3	58.4	58.4	58.4	58.2	58.5	58.2	58.6
N	3,614	3,574	3,596	3,581	3,581	3,614	3,614	3,614	3,361	2,747	3,554	3,554

Note: "Most Demanding Family Arrangements" not included in Model 11 because of multicollinearity. Significance levels: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

(see Table A-2). The results also hold when we restrict the sample to respondents with children at home and to respondents with children under the age of seven.[9]

Table 5 also presents the results of models that predict whether a respondent expressed interest in running for office in the future and whether he or she ever considered seeking high-level (statewide or federal) office. We focus on high-level offices because the initial decision to run for office tends to occur at the local level. Thus, we can conclude that family arrangements do not affect political ambition only if we can demonstrate that they exert no influence even on interest in top-level positions. Once again, significant gender gaps in ambition emerge. Women are 11 percentage points less likely than men (0.70 compared to 0.81) to express interest in running in the future. And women are only half as likely as men to have considered running for high-level office. But family structures and roles do not account for these gender differences.[10]

Not only do traditional family arrangements fail to diminish female potential candidates' interest in running for office, but among those respondents who demonstrated overt political ambition, we also find no relationship with traditional family roles. Table 6 presents two models of direct political ambition: taking concrete steps that typically precede a candidacy and entering an electoral race. The models control for political recruitment, perceptions of qualifications to run for office, and sociodemographic and political factors that are well-known predictors of political ambition.[11] In each case, we uncover a gender gap. Women are 7 percentage points less likely than men to have taken at least one concrete step that tends to precede running for office (0.51 predicted probability for women, compared to 0.58 for men). And among respondents who have considered running for office, women have a 0.12 likelihood of entering an actual race; the average man's predicted probability is 0.20. Once again, though, family arrangements are not significant. Moreover, when we split the sample by respondent sex, or interact sex with the family variables, the results do not change. Family structures and roles, both as principal components and when interacted with sex, never approach statistical significance or change our substantive results (see Table A-2).

The multivariate analyses all paint a consistent picture and provide strong support for the *No Direct-Effects Hypothesis*. Women, on a variety of measures—both attitudinal and behavorial—are less politically ambitious than similarly situated men. Traditional family structures and roles, however, do not appear to account for the gender gaps we uncover.

The Indirect Effects of Traditional Family Arrangements on Political Ambition

If we are to argue that traditional family roles do not contribute to the gender gap in political ambition among women and men who have made it into the pool of eligible candidates, then we must demonstrate that they also do not operate indirectly through its main predictors. The *No Indirect-Effects Hypothesis* posits that family arrangements will exert no influence on the central predictors of political ambition: political recruitment, self-perceived qualifications, and political participation. Here, too, we uncover strong empirical support for our expectations.

Turning first to political recruitment, women are significantly less likely than men to receive the suggestion to run for office from a party leader, elected official, or nonelected political activist. Whereas 49% of men in the sample report receiving the suggestion to run for office from an electoral gatekeeper, only 39% of women do so (difference significant at $p < .05$). The regression coefficients presented in Table 7 reveal that sex remains statistically significant even after controlling for the variables that facilitate direct contact with political actors who might suggest a candidacy. We find that the "average" woman has a 0.60 predicted probability of being recruited to run for office, compared to the 0.76 likelihood of her "average" male counterpart.

It is well known that the amount of time a potential candidate has available to devote to an often long,

[9]Interacting sex with the party identification and other significant background variables reveals that these correlates of ambition do not exert differential impacts on women and men.

[10]Women have a 0.04 predicted probability of considering a run for high-level office, compared to men's 0.08 predicted probability. We also performed the regression analyses predicting whether the respondent ever considered running for school board, mayor, city council, state legislator, attorney general, governor, judge, member of the U.S. House, or U.S. Senator (controlling in each equation for the full set of variables in our general model, as well as whether the respondent was recruited to run for that specific office). For school board, the coefficients on children and children living at home are positive and significant, as we might expect. But for the remaining eight offices, family arrangements, and their interactions with sex, are statistically insignificant. If having to relocate affected the decision-making process because of family concerns, then we would expect the family-arrangements variables to matter at least for some of the higher offices, but they do not.

[11]Scholars also identify open seats, term limits, legislative professionalization, and partisan composition of the constituency as factors individuals consider when seeking office (Black 1972; Schlesinger 1966; Stone and Maisel 2003). But we uncover no evidence that these measures of the political-opportunity structure interact with family arrangements.

TABLE 5 The Impact of Family Structures and Roles on Attitudes toward Running for Office (logistic regression coefficients and standard errors)

	Considered Running for Office	Interested in Running for Office in Future	Considered Running for High-Level Office
Sex (Female)	-.57	-.57	-.74
	(.11)**	(.11)**	(.18)**
Family Structures			
Married	.12	.11	.09
	(.13)	(.13)	(.21)
Children	-.06	.10	-.23
	(.16)	(.15)	(.25)
Children living at home	.02	.04	-.01
	(.13)	(.12)	(.20)
Children under age 7	.57	.08	.35
	(.16)**	(.16)	(.22)
Family Roles and Responsibilities			
Responsible for majority of household tasks	-.08	-.00	-.31
	(.13)	(.12)	(.23)
Responsible for majority of child care	.16	.10	.04
	(.14)	(.13)	(.26)
Political Recruitment and Qualifications			
Recruited to run by a political actor	1.10	.16	.38
	(.11)**	(.12)	(.18)*
Encouraged to run by spouse/family member	1.16	1.03	.90
	(.11)**	(.11)**	(.23)**
Self-perceived qualifications to run for office	.59	.37	.45
	(.06)**	(.06)**	(.10)**
Baseline Predictors of Political Ambition			
Age	-.02	-.05	-.03
	(.01)**	(.01)**	(.01)**
Education	.04	.02	.01
	(.05)	(.05)	(.08)
Income	-.25	-.22	.35
	(.05)**	(.05)**	(.08)**
Race (white)	.42	.04	.03
	(.13)**	(.12)	(.18)
Party Identification (increasingly Republican)	.01	.05	-.01
	(.02)	(.02)*	(.03)
Political knowledge	.03	-.02	.24
	(.05)	(.05)	(.09)**
Political interest	.08	.03	-.14
	(.08)	(.07)	(.14)
Political efficacy	.05	.15	.07
	(.05)	(.04)**	(.07)
Political participation	.20	.12	.07
	(.03)**	(.03)**	(.04)
Constant	-2.70	1.58	-6.72
	(.50)**	(.48)**	(.91)**
Percent correctly predicted	77.7	72.9	92.3
Pseudo R^2	.48	.28	.17
N	3,204	2,814	3,204

Note: The equation predicting interest in running for office in the future is restricted to the sub-sample of respondents who have not already run for office. Significance levels: $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$.

TABLE 6 The Impact of Family Structures and Roles on Direct Political Ambition (logistic regression coefficients and standard errors)

	Took At Least One Concrete Step toward Running for Office	Actually Ran for Office
Sex (female)	-.28	-.35
	(.10)**	(.17)*
Family Structures		
Married	.09	-.01
	(.12)	(.19)
Children	-.13	.04
	(.15)	(.23)
Children living at home	-.07	.21
	(.12)	(.18)
Children under age 7	.20	-.32
	(.15)	(.27)
Family Roles and Responsibilities		
Responsible for majority of household tasks	-.00	.23
	(.12)	(.19)
Responsible for majority of child care	.05	.18
	(.13)	(.21)
Political Recruitment and Qualifications		
Recruited to run by a political actor	.91	.74
	(.10)**	(.20)**
Encouraged to run by a spouse or family member	1.09	-.24
	(.11)**	(.22)
Self-perceived qualifications to run for office	.20	.70
	(.05)**	(.11)**
Baseline Predictors of Political Ambition		
Age	.01	.04
	(.01)	(.01)**
Education	-.11	-.09
	(.05)*	(.06)
Income	-.20	-.27
	(.04)**	(.06)**
Race (white)	-.02	.26
	(.12)	(.20)
Party identification (increasingly Republican)	.09	.07
	(.02)**	(.03)*
Political knowledge	.06	-.15
	(.05)	(.08)
Political interest	.17	-.00
	(.08)*	(.18)
Political efficacy	.13	-.09
	(.04)**	(.06)
Political participation	.19	.33
	(.02)**	(.04)**
Constant	-2.85	-6.24
	(.48)**	(.87)**
Percent correctly predicted	74.5	81.0
Pseudo R^2	.39	.30
N	3,204	1,753

Note: The reduced number of cases results from list-wise deletion. "Actually ran for office" includes only the subsample of respondents who had considered a candidacy. Significance levels: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

arduous campaign can affect political gatekeepers' recruitment choices (see Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001). Our findings suggest, however, that although women are less likely than men to be recruited, adherence to traditional family roles and responsibilities does not explain the disparity. Not only is each of the family-arrangements variables statistically insignificant, but so, too, are interactions between sex and the family structures and roles measures (see Table A-3).

The same is true when we turn to self-perceived qualifications to run for office. Table 8 presents the results of three regression equations. The first is an ordered logit model that predicts where respondents place themselves on a 4-point qualifications continuum (from "not at all qualified" to "very qualified" to run for office). The second and third columns report the logistic regression coefficients from models that predict whether a respondent places himself or herself on the two ends of the qualifications continuum—that is, whether they consider themselves "very qualified" and whether they self-assess as "not at all qualified" to run for office. Each equation controls for demographics, as well as political participation, interest, knowledge, and recruitment. We also include indices that tap into respondents' objective political qualifications and the importance they accord to credentials when evaluating politicians (see Fox and Lawless 2011b).

Overall, men in the sample are roughly 60% more likely than women to consider themselves "very qualified" to seek an elective position. Women are more than twice as likely as men to assert that they are "not at all qualified" to run. Beyond the sex of the respondent, potential candidates' self-assessments are driven by demographic factors, as well as their involvement with the political system. But gender differences in family arrangements play no role in these self-assessments. Further, when we include in the regression-equations interactions between the sex of the respondent and the family-arrangements measures, none of the interaction terms is significant (see Table A-3).

Finally, traditional family arrangements do not influence the degree to which respondents engage in political activities. We asked respondents whether—in the past two years—they had engaged in 10 different types of political participation, ranging from voting to contributing money to a candidate to serving on the board of an organization. Comparisons between levels of political participation for parents versus nonparents, respondents with children living at home versus those without, and individuals who are responsible for the majority of the household tasks and child care versus those who are not, reveal no differences. The mean number of acts of political participation (on a 10-point scale) for respondents who are responsible for a majority of the household tasks and child care is 5.61; the mean number of acts for respondents who do not shoulder the majority of these responsibilities is 5.62. Burdens typically associated with a traditional division of labor in the household, therefore, do not limit potential candidates' political activism.

The data presented in Tables 7 and 8 amount to strong evidence for the *No Indirect-Effects Hypothesis*. Women are disadvantaged in political recruitment and self-assessed qualifications, both of which predict interest in running for office. But marital and parental status, as well as the distribution of household labor and child care, do not account for the gender gaps we identify.

Gender and Perceptions of Family Roles and Responsibilities

A full assessment of the relationship between family arrangements and the gender gap in political ambition among potential candidates must recognize that many of the perceptions women and men hold about the political process are engrained by a culture that reinforces traditional sex-role expectations (Enloe 2004; Freedman 2002). Researchers examining candidates and elected officials, as well as potential candidates, have found gender differences in perceptions of leadership roles, ability to climb the career ladder, and political qualifications (Fox and Lawless 2011a; Fulton et al. 2006; Thomas 2002). In addition, interview evidence from potential candidates indicates that women are more likely than men to describe an engaged parental role and a deep attachment to their children (Lawless and Fox 2010). Thus, deeply embedded cultural notions of family may lead male and female potential candidates to perceive their family responsibilities differently. That is, women with traditional family roles and responsibilities might be more likely than men to believe that it is important to be home during the early years of childhood, or they might be more likely than men to be concerned with family privacy.

Because our measures of family structures and roles might not fully capture the extent to which family concerns impede women's political ambition, it is important to test the impact of family-related perceptions more explicitly. Our survey instrument asked respondents whether they could rearrange their lives to pursue elective office if they were so inclined, as well as whether time away from their families or a loss of privacy for their families would deter them from running.

TABLE 7 **The Impact of Family Structures and Roles on Political Recruitment (logistic regression coefficients and standard errors)**

	Recruited to Run for Office by a Party Leader, Elected Official, or Political Activist
Sex (female)	-.89 (.10)**
Family Structures	
Married	.09 (.12)
Children	.09 (.15)
Children living at home	-.18 (.12)
Children under age 7	.12 (.15)
Family Roles and Responsibilities	
Responsible for majority of household tasks	-.07 (.12)
Responsible for majority of child care	.04 (.13)
Baseline Predictors of Political Recruitment	
Age	-.01 (.01)
Education	-.15 (.04)**
Income	-.11 (.04)**
Race (white)	-.35 (.11)**
Party identification (increasingly Republican)	-.01 (.02)
Worked or volunteered on a campaign	1.41 (.09)**
Attended a political meeting	1.05 (.15)**
Served on a nonprofit board	.98 (.10)**
Interacted with elected officials at work	.77 (.12)**
Member of women's organization(s)	1.80 (.14)**
Constant	-.91 (.38)**
Percent correctly predicted	74.2
Pseudo R^2	.40
N	3,422

Note: The reduced number of cases results from list-wise deletion. Significance levels: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

Table 9 presents the results of three regression equations. Each dependent variable gauges a measure of how respondents perceive family life when thinking about running for elective office. We include as independent variables sex, family structures and roles, and interactions between sex and the family measures. Overall, the analysis reveals that women are more likely than men to express an inability to rearrange their lives to run for office, as well as concern regarding time away from their families. But the gender differences do not result from traditional family arrangements. Certainly, family dynamics play a role in potential candidates' perceptions of their flexibility and willingness to enter the electoral fray. Having young children, for example, increases the likelihood that respondents are leery of the time commitment and loss of privacy that often accompany a campaign. Married respondents are also less likely to say that they could rearrange their lives to run for office, and they are more likely to be deterred by time away from the family. None of the interactions between sex and family structures, roles, and responsibilities, however, is significant. Interactions between sex and the family variables are also insignificant when we include each interaction term individually. And the family structures and roles variables do not operate differently when we perform the analyses separately on the subsamples of women and men. In other words, among potential candidates, women's perceptions of their family roles as constraints to running for office are driven no more by family structures and responsibilities than are men's.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, our data indicate that, among potential candidates, family roles and responsibilities do not prevent women from considering a run for elective office. Because we uncover a persistent gender gap in political ambition, as well as a deeply gendered distribution of household labor and child care among

TABLE 8 The Impact of Family Structures and Roles on Perceptions of Qualifications (logistic regression coefficients and standard errors)

	4-Point Qualifications Scale (Ordered Logit)	Respondent Considers Self "Very Qualified" to Run for Office (Logit)	Respondent Considers Self "Not At All Qualified" to Run for Office (Logit)
Sex (female)	-.61	-.58	.68
	(.08)**	(.11)**	(.17)**
Family Structures			
Married	-.09	-.09	.14
	(.10)	(.13)	(.19)
Children	.08	.01	-.19
	(.12)	(.15)	(.25)
Children living at home	.08	.09	-.29
	(.09)	(.12)	(.21)
Children under age 7	.02	-.01	-.01
	(.12)	(.15)	(.25)
Family Roles and Responsibilities			
Responsible for majority of household tasks	-.08	.04	.02
	(.09)	(.13)	(.18)
Responsible for majority of child care	.03	.04	.27
	(.10)	(.14)	(.20)
Baseline Predictors of Qualifications			
Age	.01	.02	.01
	(.00)**	(.01)**	(.01)
Education	.32	.30	-.33
	(.03)**	(.05)**	(.07)**
Income	.20	.15	-.20
	(.03)**	(.05)**	(.06)**
Race (white)	-.04	-.30	-.37
	(.09)	(.12)**	(.19)*
Party identification (increasingly Republican)	.05	.06	-.05
	(.02)**	(.02)**	(.04)
Recruitment by electoral gatekeeper	.92	.97	-1.57
	(.08)**	(.10)**	(.25)**
Political proximity index	.28	.20	-.35
	(.03)**	(.05)**	(.06)**
Professional credentials index	.16	.19	-.14
	(.03)**	(.04)**	(.06)*
Campaign experience index	.25	.24	-.26
	(.05)**	(.06)**	(.11)*
Perceived importance of credentials index	-.02	.03	.07
	(.01)	(.02)	(.03)**
Constant		-6.58	-.36
		(.60)**	(.86)
Threshold 1	1.49		
	(.43)**		
Threshold 2	3.62		
	(.43)**		
Threshold 3	5.61		
	(.44)**		
Percent correctly predicted		76.2	92.3
Pseudo-R^2	.30	.26	.26
N	3,210	3,210	3,210

Note: The reduced number of cases results from list-wise deletion. Significance levels: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

potential candidates, this finding runs counter to prevailing expectations. But the statistical evidence is overwhelming. Regardless of how we measure family structures and responsibilities, gauge political ambition, or specify our models, the results are always the same: family roles and structures do not predict interest in running for office. And when we extend our analysis to pursuing an actual candidacy—which is, admittedly, based on far fewer cases—the results remain the same. Our analysis also reveals that family structures and roles do not work through the central predictors of political ambition; they do not affect potential candidates'

TABLE 9 The Impact of Family Structures and Roles on Perceptions of the Importance of Family (logistic regression coefficients and standard errors)

	3-Point Scale Indicating the Difficulty of Rearranging Life to Run for Office (Ordered Logit)	Respondent Considers Time Away from Family a Deterrent to Running for Office (Logit)	Respondent Considers Potential Loss of Privacy for Family a Deterrent to Running for Office (Logit)
Sex (female)	.91	.90	.38
	(.19)**	(.29)**	(.21)
Family Structures			
Married	.30	.75	.21
	(.14)*	(.24)**	(.18)
Children	.01	.15	-.25
	(.14)	(.21)	(.17)
Children living at home	.23	.63	.46
	(.12)	(.15)**	(.13)**
Children under age 7	-.02	.49	.29
	(.15)	(.16)**	(.16)
Family Roles and Responsibilities			
Responsible for majority of household tasks	.07	.32	.04
	(.19)	(.24)	(.21)
Responsible for majority of child care	-.24	-.12	-.17
	(.24)	(.32)	(.29)
Interactions			
Sex * Married	-.34	-.34	-.18
	(.20)	(.28)	(.22)
Sex * Children	-.12	-.22	.14
	(.21)	(.28)	(.23)
Sex * Children living at home	.13	.16	.19
	(.19)	(.21)	(.19)
Sex * Children under age 7	.01	-.07	-.04
	(.24)	(.23)	(.22)
Sex * Responsible for majority of household tasks	-.06	-.03	.28
	(.23)	(.27)	(.24)
Sex * Responsible for majority of child care	.13	.14	-.00
	(.28)	(.34)	(.32)
Constant		-2.53	-1.16
		(.26)	(.18)**
Threshold 1	-1.28		
	(.15)**		
Threshold 2	-.05		
	(.14)		
Percent correctly predicted		74.4	67.7
Pseudo-R^2	.03	.10	.05
N	3,440	3,474	3,470

Note: The reduced number of cases results from list-wise deletion. Significance levels: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

political recruitment, perceptions of their qualifications to run for office, or levels of political participation. Together, these findings challenge the conventional assumption that traditional family arrangements are a central impediment to female potential candidates' ultimate emergence into the political arena.

It is important to note a limitation of our family and political ambition measures; they do not allow us to pinpoint that exact time at which potential candidates considered running or when their family responsibilities may have been the most burdensome. But evidence from our panel data of similar samples of potential candidates suggests that changes in family circumstances across a seven-year period did not affect political ambition (Fox and Lawless 2011a). Between 2001 and 2008—the distance between the two waves of the panel study—13% of respondents experienced a change in marital status, 10% had or adopted a child, and 31% had a child move out of the house. Yet these changes in family life generally did not affect women's (or men's) interest in running for office or entering an actual race (see online Appendix C and Table A-4). The only family-related finding was that a new child *increased* interest in running for office, for both women and men. Certainly, future research may want to take up the question of the proximity of family roles and political ambition. But the panel data ultimately support our contention that family roles do not influence candidate emergence, at least not among women and men in the pool of potential candidates.

Our findings are consistent with what we view as the normalization of the double bind, or perhaps more aptly put—double burden—that many professional women face. The struggle to balance family roles with professional responsibilities has simply become part of the bargain for contemporary women. Consider the gender differences in how respondents fill a typical 24 hours. Based on a question that asked respondents to recount how they spend an average day, the data reveal that women and men tend to work the same number of hours (nine hours per day) and sleep the same number of hours (seven hours each night). But women report spending about 2.1 hours per day on household tasks, compared to men, who report spending about 1.6 hours per day. Among respondents with children, women spend 2.8 hours per day on child care, compared to men, who spend 1.7 hours per day (gender differences significant at $p < .05$). These data suggest that the feminist ideal that women can try to "have it all" captures the life experiences of many women in our sample of potential candidates. Women have substantial professional demands that they must balance with family considerations, but they have become accustomed to doing so. The work/life balance has become such a regular part of their daily routine that women's family dynamics do not discourage them from thinking about or embarking on a political career.

Though family structures and roles certainly contribute to women's underrepresentation in the candidate eligibility pool, the "family explanation" does little to explain the gender disparity in interest in running for office once potential candidates find themselves in the pipeline professions. That said, the gender gap in political ambition among potential candidates is as large now as it was a decade ago. Narrowing the list of plausible explanations—especially ones that seem to have so much intuitive appeal—for women's underrepresentation is a critical step to understanding the long-term prospects for gender parity in U.S. political institutions. And the lack of explanatory power conferred by family arrangements highlights that other barriers to women's emergence as candidates clearly merit investigation. Given that candidate recruitment and self-perceived qualifications remain our best explanations for the gender gap in political ambition, dismantling these structural and psychological barriers is required to bring about significant increases in female candidates' emergence. Beginning to identify other impediments that women in the candidate eligibility pool face will also pay dividends. After all, the gender gap in political ambition persists even in the face of strong controls for factors that we know depress women's interest in running for office, as well as those that the conventional wisdom assumed to be paramount for the last several decades.

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Richard L. Fox is Professor of Political Science at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

Jennifer L. Lawless is Professor of Government at American University, Washington, DC 20016.