Pipelines to Equal Representation? Gender and Political Ambition at the Local Level

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The elections of 2018 were widely described as a new "Year of the Woman." Scholars and media alike noted the particularly high rates of women seeking office in 2018 and highlighted the achievements of new elected officials who brought diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, and age to government. Many wondered if these elections were a harbinger of new things to come both for who runs for office and who wins. Were the 2018 elections actually different? Did they open the political pipeline to different types of candidates than those who ran before? Will they produce a more diverse government that gets closer to accurately representing American constituents?

If 2018 did indeed reshape political candidates and officeholders, we might expect that change to be most evident at the local level. Staging a campaign for state or federal office – particularly through a nontraditional path or without the typical traits of political candidates – may seem too imposing for many considering candidacy. However, seeking office at a lower level – where fundraising requirements, campaign demands, and the size and population of one's constituency are typically smaller – may seem more manageable for new entrants on the political scene. This paper thus examines who ran for county offices in 2018 across the US, evaluating the traits, backgrounds, recruitment to run, campaign support, and progressive ambition of county candidates, and comparing first-time candidates in 2018's Year of the Woman to those who sought office before the 2016 election. [*Note to readers: This paper's contents serve as the foundation for several chapters in a book manuscript that will evaluate these questions in greater detail – for both local and state legislative candidates – explaining men's overrepresentation in political office in the US and predicting prospects for change in representational equality in the future. I would be particularly grateful for suggestions about this work related to the development of that manuscript. Thanks!*]

In this paper, I examine how ambition develops among men and women such that they enter the initial pipeline of candidacy for local political office and develop progressive ambition to seek other offices in the future. I draw on an original survey of candidates who ran for one of several county-level offices in 2018. Using this data, I first identify the characteristics and backgrounds of men and women candidates for county offices. I provide new information about who seeks local offices, the political and community experiences that they built up prior to running, and how these differ by gender and between experienced candidates and those who first decided to pursue office following the 2016 election. I reveal that 2018 was a Year of the Woman at the local level as well as higher levels – with a surge in women candidates running for the first time that year. However, I also show that gendered patterns in pre-candidacy

qualifications remain, with men continuing to run with fewer qualifications and relevant experiences than women.

Second, I uncover the recruitment and encouragement experiences that drove candidate emergence, highlighting how these differ for men and women, and particularly how the balance of personal and political sources of encouragement differ for women who first ran in 2018 and those who came before. Consistent with previous research, I find that men are willing to run with less encouragement than women. However, I also reveal that the sources of recruitment of women candidates shifted in 2018, with new women candidates receiving more recruitment from traditional political sources than women who first sought office in previous years.

Next, I evaluate the individuals who most inspired men and women to run for office – both those they know personally and the role models who inspired them from afar – and consider how the gender of particularly important influencers varies for men and women. I find that key pathways of political recruitment are gendered – very few men identify a woman as their most important political source of encouragement, while a much larger proportion of women were most inspired to run by a female political connection. I identify a similar pattern in the gender of role models not personally known to my respondents who inspired their political candidacies as well.

Fourth, I explain the various forms of support local candidates receive – both from party organizations and from community or interest groups – and clarify how this support is distributed by candidate gender and for first-time versus experienced candidates – noting, again, some distinct patterns for women first-time candidates in 2018. Women who ran for office the first time during the new Year of the Woman received more frequent support by both parties and other groups than any other type of candidate.

Finally, I identify the levels of progressive ambition held by county candidates. How many want to seek higher office? Which offices do they hope to run for? And, do the answers to these questions differ for men and women? While some gender differences in ambition remain, particularly among men and women seeking less powerful county offices, I find that among candidates seeking county legislative offices, men's and women's ambition is very similar. It may be that the increased recruitment and support that women running during 2018's Year of the Woman received – particularly from traditional political sources –laid the groundwork for both men *and women* to consider moving up the political pipeline in the future.

Why This Study, These Candidates, This Year?

Who Cares About Local Candidates?

The tens of thousands of local officials in office across the US are responsible for a much of the governance that affects the daily lives of those residing in the US. County governments expend a great deal of tax money (spending billions each year providing services and infrastructure to residents) and employ several million people, giving them a great deal of power (NACo 2019). County governments manage key infrastructure and law enforcement, justice, health, public safety, recreation, and other services for residents and shape the functioning of American democracy by conducting elections (Benton 2002; NACo 2019).

Additionally, who holds local office has consequences for the outcomes of local governments. The way local governments raise and spend money depends, in part, on the backgrounds of those in office. Local officials' business experience (Kirkland 2018), partisanship (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016, 2018; Einstein and Glick 2016), and gender (Holman 2013) influence their spending, especially the amount of redistribution in which governments engage. Local officials' characteristics – such as gender – also shape the policy attitudes they hold and seek to implement, whether on issues of multiculturalism and LGBT attitudes (Deckman 2006), immigration (Farris and Holman 2016), or issues that disproportionately affect women like childcare, violence against women, or social service programs (Boles 2001; Farris and Holman 2015; Holman 2015). Indeed, the discretion held by county officials can affect access to health resources and democratic engagement (Michener 2018), determine who continues to reside in the US (Graham 2019), and shape access to rights provided by state or federal governments like marriage licenses for same-sex couples (Williams 2006) or drivers licenses for undocumented drivers (Epstein 2019).

Local candidates can also be part of the political pipeline, a supply of experienced politicians who are equipped to seek higher offices and influence policy and governance from those positions. While limitations in the available data on local political actors constrains our knowledge on this topic, studies suggest a large number of individuals who hold office at the local level have interest in seeking higher office, and a fairly significant proportion of higher officeholders got their start in local office. Historically, MacManus (1996) reports that 37% of county boards had at least one board member leave to run for countywide executive office in the eight years prior to 1993, while 27% of boards had a former member run for the state senate and a similar proportion for the state house. A study of big-city mayors from 1992-2015 determined that 15% eventually ran for an office above the state legislature (some also ran for state legislature or other lower offices) (Einstein et al. 2018). A recent survey of municipal, county, and state officials found 48% were at least somewhat interested in running for state legislature or state senate when presented with a hypothetical race (Marble and Lee 2018). Indeed, among state

legislators in office in 2008, many (39% of women and 44% of men) started their political careers in another office – most frequently town or city council, school board, county legislature, or some other local board or commission (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). Thus, local government provides an excellent level of analysis from which to investigate not only who develops ambition and how campaigns and elections function to determine who governs America's localities but also to understand how and among whom progressive ambition forms, shaping who governs Americans in offices at higher levels of government as well.

Furthermore, examining local candidates enables us to identify where and why inequality in representation emerges. While the conventional wisdom has been that local governments contain a set of representatives who reflect their constituents' traits more accurately than higher elected bodies, increasing collections of local data reveal that this has not historically been true for all offices and remains markedly untrue for many local offices today, particularly when evaluating representation by gender. In the early 1990s, MacManus (1996) noted that there were fewer women on county legislatures than any elective body in the US other than Congress. Things have barely improved in recent decades. While 61% of counties in 1988 had no women county legislators, this figure has declined only to 51% by 2014 (Kellogg et al. 2019; MacManus 1996), and in 2008, women composed only 17% of county legislators and 30% of county offices more broadly (Crowder-Meyer 2010). While men appear to be particularly overrepresented on county legislatures, they are overrepresented in most other local offices as well. Available data indicates men compose 79% of the 1412 mayors of large US Cities (CAWP 2019), 73% of municipal council seats (ICMA 2018), and 56% of school board members (J. Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2018). This absence of "municipal advantage" for women is a pattern that extends even beyond the US (Tolley 2011), and is a pattern that we must investigate in order to understand why men remain overrepresented throughout political systems.

Studying local offices also provides a benefit to researchers because of the greater amount of diversity in local office duties and powers than, for example, federal or state legislatures. Indeed, the "variation in the institutional and demographic characteristics of local governments… provide a multitude of opportunities to understand the constraints that limit women's representation" (Holman 2017, 292). While there are central legislative bodies at the local level such as county boards, where expectations and the application of gender stereotypes might work similarly as for candidates to state or federal legislatures, local offices also include elected positions like county clerks that are more "process oriented" and limited in their power (Bernick and Heidbreder 2018; Lublin and Brewer 2003), and positions such as school board that have more power but focus on a more stereotypically feminine policy arena. Consequently, even though masculinity may benefit candidates even at the local level (Bauer 2018), the differences between specific local offices and the dramatic variation between individual localities makes

local elections an ideal place to investigate the factors shaping who represents Americans at the local level and beyond.

What Don't We Know About Local Representation?

In this paper I aim to illuminate the process of local candidate emergence, campaign experiences at the local level, and political ambition development in some of the initial offices in the political pipeline. Investigating these topics will improve our understanding of the quality of local democracy broadly and men's overrepresentation within local governments specifically. In this paper, I focus on four key questions: First, who runs for local office and why? Second, who encourages and recruits local candidates? Third, to what extent are local candidates supported during campaigns? Finally, who has progressive ambition, hoping to use local office as a step on the political career ladder? While I will investigate each of these questions in greater depth in a book manuscript currently in process, for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on introducing some key findings from my data related to each of these questions.

I will answer these questions from the perspective of – and using survey data from – *candidates* for several *county-level* offices. In doing so, I fill two gaps in the local politics literature and literature on gender and political representation. First, much of the research on those engaged in local governments has focused on elected officials rather than *candidates* (e.g., de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016; Butler and Preece 2016; Einstein and Glick 2016; Kellogg et al. 2019). Local-level data is incredibly difficult to gather, and the challenges of obtaining information not just about officeholders but about those who ran but did not win have understandably led to a focus on elected officials in much existing research. Yet such work captures only part of the candidate emergence story. Many candidates emerge who do not win office and thus make their way into a survey of officeholders – yet, by running they have demonstrated that they have political ambition, and information from them can deepen our understanding of how ambition develops, who is encouraged to run and supported, and the impact this has on candidacy. Furthermore, all candidates also have experience campaigning, and these experiences may differ between candidates who win and lose their elections. Thus, gathering information from candidates – not just elected officials – can help us understand the diversity of support experiences candidates have and how these influence both the representatives who are eventually elected and the progressive ambition candidates develop as they consider future runs for office.[1]

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[1] Indeed, 54% of the candidates in my sample who were surveyed after losing an election in 2018 (either at the primary or general election stage) nevertheless indicated on the survey that they hoped to run for at least one office in the future – compared to 33% of those who did not lose an election. Even candidates who do not make it to the officeholder stage can hold political ambition that we might wish to explain and more deeply understand. (For

Second, existing research on these questions primarily focuses on municipal officials, especially in urban areas or more populated cities (Butler and Preece 2016; Einstein et al. 2018; though see Kellogg et al. 2019; Crowder-Meyer and Smith 2015). While we learn a great deal from that research, it also leaves us wondering about the processes of candidate emergence, campaigns, and progressive ambition development in the diverse set of offices at *the county level* – as well as about the causes of gender inequality in representation in offices like *county boards* where men's overrepresentation is particularly stark (Crowder-Meyer and Smith 2015; MacManus 1996). In fact, county offices are especially good places to investigate local politics if one wishes both to understand local representation and to be able to make inferences to higher levels of office. Because county officials are generally elected in partisan elections (whereas many towns and cities have nonpartisan elections[2]), the dynamics observed at the county level can help us understand elections further up the pipeline and can inform us particularly well about how political parties shape candidate emergence, support, and diversity in representation. Furthermore, candidates who seek county offices may be particularly well-equipped to run for higher offices because they already have experience in partisan races and connections with the types of party networks that could support future campaigns. Additionally, counties vary widely in their characteristics – from rural to urban, with wide ranging geographic sizes and population sizes, and diverse sets of constituents. They (or county-equivalents) exist across the US, in contrast to populous cities which are often the focus of existing research and are not even present in every state (Einstein et al. 2018). This variation in county context means that lessons learned by studying county politics can help us understand how candidates emerge and progress through the political pipeline in a wide variety of constituencies and settings.

The Year of the Woman

I will evaluate candidate emergence, support, and progressive ambition, and gendered patterns in each of these, using a 2018 survey of county candidates. This enables me to take advantage of an important moment in American politics, investigating candidates in the first campaigns following the 2016 election. These candidates ran in what many deemed a new "Year of the Woman" – a context in which Hillary Rodham Clinton's presidential candidacy, Donald Trump's campaign and presidency, and the rise in prominence of movements like #MeToo and #shoutyourabortion increased the salience of gender and gender-related issues (Zhou 2018). Research on the earlier 1992 Year of the Woman finds that women's participation in politics and

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example, ambition among election losers may be higher than that among election winners because those who won elections are on average older than those who lost elections (p<.01).)

[2] For example, the ICMA reports that 81% of county legislatures are elected in partisan contests (ICMA 2014), while 70% of municipal councils elect candidates without party labels on the ballot (ICMA 2018).

support for women candidates was activated by the greater focus on issues especially salient to women during the 1992 campaigns and by the presence of more women on ballots (K. Dolan 2001; Sapiro and Conover 1997), and that women voters were particularly likely to support women candidates due to their shared gender in that year (Plutzer and Zipp 1996). There is thus reason to believe that political contexts in which gender is especially salient may influence the candidate emergence and campaigning processes – shaping the development of ambition among potential candidates, affecting who encourages and recruits candidates, and determining which candidates receive support from both traditional and less traditional sources. Consequently, I expect there will be variation in the factors shaping who runs for local offices and women's representation among this group in gender-salient versus more typical election years. In this paper, I will take advantage of the variation produced by the 2018 election context and compare candidates who sought office for the first time in this new Year of the Woman context with those who first emerged to run for office prior to the 2016 election. This will enable me to evaluate whether and how candidate ambition, recruitment, and support shifted and what kinds of effects these processes have on the candidates and campaigns during and before the new Year of the Woman. In this paper, I will provide some introductory analyses of this comparison, which I will add to using time series data from state legislative candidates from 2012 through 2018 in my expansion of this work.

Candidate Emergence and Campaigns at the Local Level
Who Runs for Local Office and Why?

Given the tens of thousands of local elections across the US each election cycle and the variation in election timing and procedures for maintaining election records across localities, it is not surprising that we lack a broad understanding of who runs for local office and why.[3] Recent surveys of local elected officials (Butler and Preece 2016; Einstein et al. 2018; Marble and Lee 2018; Oliver and Conroy 2017) and compilations of data about elections or elected officials (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016, 2018; Bernick and Heidbreder 2018) have started to fill this gap, but are constrained in answering these questions because they talk only to those who have successfully won office, or gather data about the candidates who have run but without hearing from the candidates themselves regarding their experiences. Indeed, "the majority of the scholarship on women's representation in local politics focuses on women's electoral chances once they run for office, leaving questions of where women emerge as local candidates

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[3] See, for example de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw's recent note that "it was nearly impossible to find election results for many counties with fewer than 150,000 people since elections in these rural counties are often not covered by the news media and they usually have only a handful of election results on their website" (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2018, note 7)

unanswered" (Holman 2017, 289). Research on the development of political ambition makes clear that a fairly small proportion of Americans even consider candidacy (Crowder-Meyer 2018), and only a small percentage of those considered likely candidates actually run (Maisel and Stone 2014). Who are these Americans? What are their traits? What factors led them to actually become candidates? To understand whether American democracy is functioning for all – for example, offering voters choices between candidates who represent the population – we need to answer these questions. By drawing on an original survey of county candidates in 2018 I will outline the traits, backgrounds, and experiences of candidates for local offices that vary in prestige and power. As I do so, I will illuminate the extent to which various groups in the population have opportunities to vote for candidates who descriptively represent them, the level of political and community experience that typically precedes a run for local office, and the extent to which 2018's Year of the Woman extended down to the local level.

Who Encourages and Recruits Local Candidates?

Political recruitment is commonly reported both by candidates who experience it and by political elites who engage in it (Broockman 2014; Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001). Further, recruitment plays a powerful role in affecting whether candidates from groups underrepresented in politics such as Latinos (Ocampo 2017) and women (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013) seek office. Yet while it is clear that local-level political actors engage in recruitment (Crowder-Meyer 2013) and that recruitment by local sources can matter a great deal to who seeks office even at the federal level (Maisel and Stone 2014), few studies have investigated how recruitment shapes local candidate emergence (though see Butler and Preece 2016; Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece forthcoming). As local offices often provide less prestige and fewer material rewards than higher offices, recruitment may be very important to convincing candidates to seek local positions. On the other hand, local recruiters may focus their recruitment efforts on candidates seeking higher offices, aiming to spend their limited time and resources on this smaller number of more prominent positions. Since local candidates can form a 'farm team' of officials, experienced and ready to move up the political pipeline the quality and representativeness of elected officials depends a great deal on who is being encouraged to run for local offices. Using new local candidate survey data, this paper will help clarify the extent to which recruitment of local candidates occurs and who is recruiting at this level – increasing our understanding both of why particular candidates are being recruited and who holds power and is shaping politics and governance at the local level.

While more women than men who run for office report recruitment was key to their candidacy (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013), an extensive body of research indicates that men are encouraged to seek office more often than women (Crowder-Meyer 2013, 2018; Kirkpatrick

1974; Niven 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2006; Sweet-Cushman 2018b; Windett 2014). Recent research suggests that gender inequality in recruitment may be affected by a diverse set of factors. Parties recruit women more often in more competitive elections (Crowder-Meyer and Smith 2015; Folke and Rickne 2016). The Democratic party recruits women more often than the Republican party (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Crowder-Meyer 2013), though even among Democratic party elites, perceptions that the party particularly supports candidates from underrepresented groups increases support for men over women candidates (Bos 2015). Men recruit fewer women than do women party leaders (Cheng and Tavits 2009; Crowder-Meyer 2013; Sanbonmatsu 2006). More masculine candidates – whether men or women – are more likely to be recruited (Oliver and Conroy 2017). While some recent research indicates that party leaders view men and women as equally electable (Doherty, Dowling, and Miller forthcoming; though see Sanbonmatsu 2006), this seems not to have produced equal rates of recruitment by gender. Recruitment by non-party organizations is also common and important to men's and especially women's emergence as candidates, as is recruitment by personal sources such as spouses, friends, and coworkers (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Crowder-Meyer 2018).

Some research suggests that there are also gender differences in how potential candidates respond to recruitment. In particular, men's ambition increases more than women's when they are recruited – especially among Republicans (Preece and Stoddard 2015b; Preece, Stoddard, and Fisher 2016; Pruysers and Blais 2018) – perhaps because men perceive recruitment as a more substantial commitment of party support than do women (Butler and Preece 2016). Indeed, women's political ambition is sensitive to the frames used to explain why women are politically underrepresented (Holman and Schneider 2016) in ways that could be consequential for the effectiveness of candidate recruitment. Clearly, the candidate recruitment process affects the traits of those who run for and hold elected office in the US in important – and complex – ways. In this paper, I will draw on my candidate survey to elucidate what kinds of candidates at the local level are recruited, by whom, and how these patterns influence men's and women's representation.

Of course, some candidates emerge without having been directly recruited (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001) – they and others may be particularly driven to candidacy by role models or inspirations in their community or beyond. Research in the US and elsewhere has shown that the presence of women in office – potential role models – increases women's candidacies (Breux, Couture, and Koop 2019; Crowder-Meyer and Smith 2015; Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018). Further, some work suggests that feeling a connection with a woman role model during candidate trainings increases women's ambition (Sweet-Cushman 2018a) and a recent survey of 138 candidates who ran at the state and local level in 2018 finds that positive role models were noted as important to women's emergence about twice

as often as men's (Run for Something 2019). In this paper I look beyond a simple evaluation of recruitment to also evaluate the way that role models – whether personally known to potential candidates or not – influence men's and women's candidacies. Given evidence suggesting that the gender of candidate recruiters and political officials may shape responses to recruitment and political ambition (Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018; Pruysers and Blais 2019), I expect men and women to be particularly inspired to run by individuals who share their gender.

To What Extent Are Local Candidates Supported During Campaigns?

Recruiting someone to run for office may not be sufficient to persuade them to actually become a candidate. Conducting a campaign requires resources – whether expertise on strategy and issues, volunteers and voter outreach materials, donor and voter lists, or direct financial contributions. This is true at the local level just as it is at higher levels. And, at the start of the political pipeline, where most potential candidates lack political experience – it is likely that "encouragement is not enough" for a candidate to emerge or be successful in their run (Dittmar 2015, 759). This is particularly likely to be true for women, who express greater concerns about fundraising (Jenkins 2007) and the difficulties women may face in the political realm (Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2018), and who are less likely to perceive recruitment as a strong promise of other support for candidates (Butler and Preece 2016). While some research evaluates levels of support for candidates by gender at the state or federal level (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Hassell and Visalvanich forthcoming; Thomsen and Swers 2017), and surveys of local parties indicate they report participating in various campaign activities to support candidates at some levels (Crowder-Meyer 2010; Roscoe and Jenkins 2015), we know very little about how many candidates seeking local office receive support, what kinds of support they receive, what organizations support them, and how this support connects to recruitment. Furthermore, no research, to my knowledge, identifies how answers to these questions may vary by candidate gender. Yet, the extent of support local candidates receive may influence whether they are successful (e.g., were they recruited as a sacrificial lamb or actually supported once they emerged), whether they develop progressive ambition to run again or for higher office in the future, and may serve as a way that local parties and other organizations shape – intentionally or not – the traits of those elected to represent their constituencies. In this paper I will start to fill this gap in the literature by illuminating the types of support commonly received by local candidates and identifying who is supporting men and women who seek office.

Is Local Office Part of the Political Pipeline? Progressive Ambition Among Local Candidates

Because local offices are, in some ways, distinct from higher political positions – in terms of their responsibilities, the issues they focus on, their geographic proximity to an officials'

home, and their prestige and pay – some have suggested that local candidates may not often develop progressive ambition – to seek to move into higher offices. As Sokolow describes the rural officials he studies, they "were ambitious, but in ways other than trying to use local elective office as a route to higher positions or as a career in itself. They… wanted to 'do good' for themselves and their communities, to use their public service to produce some enduring impacts" (Sokolow 1989, 29). In some research, local officials holding positions on school board (Deckman 2007; Sweet-Cushman 2018b) or town council (Beck 2001) are described as rarely seeking office as a means to develop experience to move up the pipeline. Yet, other scholars use local officials precisely as a sample of potential candidates for higher offices (Butler and Preece 2016; Marble and Lee 2018), and research indicates that local offices can be a good launchpad for political careers (Kazee 1994; Schlesinger 1966). Indeed, Svara (2003) finds that more than a quarter of city council members have progressive ambition and a recent study of the career paths of mayors found that 15% of large city mayors ran for office above the state legislative level, 30% of mayors surveyed rated the US Congress as a somewhat or very appealing position, and a majority of mayors said this about a position in the US Senate or as a governor (Einstein et al. 2018). However, very little research has identified the levels of progressive ambition held by local candidates and elected officials across a diverse set of office, nor examined what factors both before and during campaigns shape progressive ambition.

A closer examination of progressive ambition in local politics is important both to help us understand the political pipeline generally and because there are reasons to think that gender differences in progressive ambition may influence inequality in who holds higher offices. Einstein et al. (2018) find that women mayors are less likely than men to rate higher offices as appealing (despite reports of similar levels of recruitment by gender). Sweet-Cushman (2018b) indicates that while school board members have low progressive ambition overall, rates seem to be a bit higher for men than women. A recent study of state legislative careers reveals that men are about twice as likely as women state legislators to run for Congress (Brown et al. n.d.). Scholars have identified various factors that produce greater political ambition among men than women. Some, such as men's lower aversion to competition (Kanthak and Woon 2015; Preece and Stoddard 2015a) or men's greater likelihood of initially seeking local office as a first step in a political career (Deckman 2007) may influence progressive ambition as well. Yet few studies have specifically investigated the reasons for gender differences in progressive ambition. In this paper, I will introduce data on the levels of progressive ambition among men and women running for different types of local offices, as a foundation for further explorations of the causes of progressive ambition and gender differences in it as I expand this project.

In sum, this paper will present some initial data aimed at answering four questions:

1. Who runs for local office and why?
2. Who encourages and recruits local candidates and inspires candidates to emerge?
3. To what extent are local candidates supported during campaigns?
4. Is local office part of the political pipeline?

This presentation – as well as the book manuscript that will explore these questions in much greater depth[4] – aims to fill gaps in the research on these topics broadly, to specifically bolster our understanding of the answers to these questions among candidates (not just elected officials) for several county-level offices, and to elucidate the extent to which the post-2016 political context is reshaping political ambition, campaigns, and representation by gender.

Data & Method

"One principal obstacle" limiting research on gender and local representation "is a lack of consistent and reliable information on women's representation in local politics" (Holman 2017, 292). Indeed, the "lack of centralized data" on local politics and the difficulties involved in collecting local data from individual sources are commonly lamented (e.g., de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2018; Trounstine 2009, 615). This project aims to broaden our understanding of representation in local politics by drawing on a new dataset I compiled that both identifies the characteristics of candidates who sought county-level office in 2018 and captures – using a survey – their experiences before and during their campaigns for office.

I first generated a sample of counties to study. From the vast majority of counties in the US that conduct partisan county elections, I selected a stratified random sample of 250 counties (or county-equivalents). Specifically, I separated states into quintiles based on their "gender equality mood," and then sampled 50 counties from each of five strata defined by those quintiles. The gender equality mood measure captures state-level attitudes toward gender roles drawing on a variety of survey questions over time, and ranges – in 2010 – from the state with the lowest support for equal gender roles (Mississippi) to the highest (Hawaii) (Koch and Thomsen 2017). To these 250 counties, I added a sample of 55 counties from the small number (largely in Wisconsin, California, and Minnesota) that conduct non-partisan county elections. I also gathered data from the universe of counties in North Carolina – a state with a population that is generally reflective of national demographics (e.g., in education, economics, race and ethnicity)

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[4] Specifically, in the future I will expand individual sections of this paper into book chapters, by exploring more details in the local candidate data (e.g., considering the data split by party, by office being sought, and the like) and in some cases by drawing on time series data from surveys of state legislative candidates from 2012 through 2018. I look forward to readers' thoughts regarding the direction these further analyses will take as I add nuance to the initial findings discussed here.

and politics,[5] and the state where the survey would originate from – a characteristic chosen in the hopes of enhancing survey response rates.

Within each sampled county, I gathered names, party, and contact information about all candidates who appeared on ballots in the 2018 primary or general elections for county legislatures (e.g., county boards of supervisors, commissions, councils) and county administrative positions (e.g., county clerk, recorder, registrar).[6] In North Carolina, I also gathered this data about candidates for county boards of education (for reasons discussed below). This data about candidates is not generally available in a central repository – for example, Project Vote Smart and similar sources typically gather information about only candidates for higher offices and, at best, hold only information about incumbents for some local offices. Therefore, my dataset was compiled largely through online searches of individual county websites, sample ballots, and candidate election filings, and through phone calls to county election officials.

I gathered data on offices at the county level for the reasons I detail above (e.g., county offices are generally elected in partisan contests and counties provide wide variation in geographic and population characteristics), which make a study of county politics helpful for understanding candidate emergence, campaigns, and representational inequality more broadly. I focus my study specifically on candidates for county legislatures, administrative offices, and boards of education in order to capture how candidates emerge and campaign for offices with varying levels of power and prestige, varying histories of political representation by gender, and varying associations with traditionally masculine or feminine gender stereotypes.

County legislators are among the most powerful county officials, often making policy regarding budgets, transportation, infrastructure, criminal justice, and the like. In fact, the partisanship of county legislatures has been shown to affect county spending (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2018). As such, county legislative office may be considered to align more with stereotypical traits associated with men – such as power, leadership, and expertise with fiscal policy – than those associated with women (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Schneider and Bos 2014). On the other hand, the administrative positions in county governments, such as clerks and recorders, are typically "process-oriented offices with less discretion" (Lublin and Brewer

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[5] US Census data on NC is available at https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045218 and can be compared to nationwide data here https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218. Politically, Hillary Clinton won 50.5% of the two-party vote nationally in 2016, and 48% in North Carolina.

[6] In this paper I use the term "administrative" to reference county offices that deal largely with administrative tasks such as keeping records related to property ownership, taxation, and court documentation, managing election filings, and administering elections. Some counties – particularly those governed under a council-manager form of government – may also have an individual who holds the title of county manager or county administrator (Istrate and Mills 2015). This position is generally appointed (rather than elected) and is *not* included in the administrative positions I reference in this work.

2003, 379) and focus more on attending to the needs of constituents. These less prestigious positions align more closely with stereotypes that women are more communal and thus better at serving constituents – and findings that women in local, state, and federal offices do, in fact spend more time on constituency service (Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2018; Richardson and Freeman 1995; Thomas 1992). Indeed, while county legislative offices are dominated by men, women are much more likely to run for and win process-oriented offices like clerk or register (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstine 2015; Lublin and Brewer 2003), including a majority of these positions in the twelve states included in one recent study (Bernick and Heidbreder 2018). Boards of Education provide a middle ground between county legislatures and administrative offices – both in terms of the power they possess (the broader power of a legislative body, but over a more constrained issue area than most county legislatures) and the gender stereotypes associated with them (they are more powerful offices, but make policy on a stereotypically feminine issue (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993)) – and due to the moderate level of women's representation (44%) on these boards (Sweet-Cushman 2018b). Most states govern their schools through independent school districts or a mixed system that does not align with county boundaries (Census.gov 2019) – making for difficult comparisons with my other county candidate data. However, in North Carolina, most public school systems are county-dependent systems. Thus, in gathering data about candidates from the universe of counties in North Carolina, I added county board of education candidates to my data on county legislatures and county administrative positions.

After collecting contact information for nearly 2500 candidates, I sent surveys to this sample of individuals who ran in primary or general elections for county legislatures, administrative positions, and boards of education in 2018.[7] I initially planned to survey my entire sample prior to the November 2018 Election Day.[8] Indeed, I made my initial contact with my national sample of survey respondents in September 2018, and sent them a series of letters, postcards, and emails (when email addresses were available) providing opportunities to complete

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[7] I aimed to identify all individuals who appeared on a primary or general election ballot for a given office in a sampled county. While primary elections are often not held at the local level, due to an absence of competition within a given party or in cases where the election is non-partisan, the data gathered for this paper captures both candidates who contested primary elections and were unsuccessful as well as those who appeared on general election ballots either due to being uncontested for their party's general election nomination or due to winning a contested primary. By including candidates who ran unsuccessfully in primary or general elections, this paper expands our understanding beyond most existing research on local representation which focuses on those who won general elections or, occasionally, the candidates who contested general elections. In gathering data from a broader pool of candidates, I can provide a more complete understanding of the factors that shape candidate emergence – not just candidate success – something particularly important in 2018 when many have suggested that candidate entry surged.

[8] Because some local elections are conducted on a different calendar from federal elections, this means many, though not all, candidates surveyed would not yet know the outcome of the general election for the office they sought at the time they completed the survey.

the survey online or on paper. This Wave 1 sample included a small number of North Carolina counties. Unfortunately, Hurricane Florence made landfall in North Carolina the week of my initial survey distribution, producing extensive property damage and power outages, injuries and fatalities, and creating a context in which it was both inappropriate and likely ineffective to conduct a survey. Consequently, due to the need to avoid the busy times in the aftermath of this natural disaster, immediately around Election Day, and during the November and December holidays, I administered Wave 2 of my survey to candidates from the universe of North Carolina counties beginning in January 2019. Although delayed in start date, this survey followed the same procedures in terms of timing and types of contacts as used in Wave 1.[9]

Characteristics of Respondents to the 2018 Local Candidate Study

      I attempted to contact 2,457 candidates for this survey and received 805 responses for a response rate of 32.8%.[10] The majority of respondents to my survey (61%) were candidates for county legislative office, while 17% were candidates for county administrative positions (e.g., county clerk) and 22% were candidates for board of education.[11] Consistent with patterns in politics more broadly, a majority of my respondents were men and were white. Men composed 62% of my survey respondents (slightly less than the 67% they composed of all candidates in my survey sample) and 85% of my respondents identified as white. Men were particularly common candidates for county legislative offices (composing 70% of that group), a majority (56%) of board of education candidates and a minority of candidates (45%) only for administrative positions. Whites were the greatest share of candidates for administrative offices (94%), but

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[9] In general, responses from Wave 1 and Wave 2 are very similar, and consequently I typically report data from both waves together in this paper. More details about the similarities and infrequent differences between Wave 1 and Wave 2 will be available in the larger book manuscript.

[10] This response rate does not take into account that some of the contact information I collected was inaccurate or outdated (e.g., postal mail was returned to sender or email addresses were no longer active), so a small proportion of those to whom I sent survey communications never received those communications but are included in the number of total attempted contacts. My response rate was higher for Wave 2 of the survey (attempted to contact 1,179 candidates and received 441 responses (37.4%)) than Wave 1 (attempted to contact 1,278 candidates and received 364 responses (28.4%)), likely because the Wave 2 sample all resided in the state where my college is located, but both waves received substantially higher response rates than other recent surveys of elites (e.g., Marble and Lee's (2018) recent survey of municipal, county, and state officials received an 8% response rate, Einstein et al.'s (2018) survey of large city mayors received a 20% response rate). I attribute this higher response rate to a variety of techniques used in this survey such as hand-signing each survey invitation and reminder letter, hand stamping each envelope and postcard, offering both an online and paper version of the survey, and following many aspects of Dillman et al.'s (2014) Tailored Design Method. I will provide further details about my survey technique, sample, and response rate in future expansions of this project.

[11] These figures are similar to those in the full sample to which I sent my survey. Additionally, the statistics outlined in these paragraphs are generally similar across both waves of the survey – Wave 1, which was sent to candidates in a stratified random sample of counties nationwide and produced 45% of my survey responses, and Wave 2, which was sent to the universe of counties in North Carolina and produced 55% of responses. I will add more details about my survey sample, respondents to the survey, and the two survey waves as I expand this project in the future.

composed a majority of both county legislative (84%) and board of education (83%) candidates who responded to my survey. The processes of candidate emergence and progressive ambition development differ for different racial, ethnic, and gender subgroups (Holman and Schneider 2016; Silva and Skulley 2018). Unfortunately, due to the dramatic overrepresentation of whites among county candidates, my data include fairly small numbers of candidates from many specific intersectional race-gender groups. This limits my ability to analyze candidate experiences by intersectional group and means that my results most accurately reflect the experiences and attitudes of white candidates (who are the disproportionate and overwhelming majority of candidates for county offices nationwide).[12]

While not all candidates surveyed competed in partisan elections, 40% of my sample reported running as Democrats and 42% ran as Republicans – the rest ran as Independents, non-partisan candidates, or (rarely) some other designation. Combining declared party affiliations with liberal to conservative self-identifications for those who did not affiliate with a party[13] reveals an almost even partisan split in my survey respondents: 49% of my sample ran as a Republican or hold a conservative-leaning ideology, while 51% ran as a Democrat or hold a liberal-leaning ideology.

Most survey respondents (58%) were non-incumbents, and 37% were seeking office for the very first time this election cycle. About a quarter of candidates reported they were competing for an open seat in 2018, and about a quarter indicated they were in a politically competitive area (in which the proportion of political offices in their area considered safe or very certain their party would win was between 40-60%). For 37% of my respondents, 2018 (or in a few cases of off-year elections, 2017) was their first ever run for elected office. The remaining proportion of my respondents first sought electoral office in a previous year (25% between 2012 and 2016, 23% between 2000 and 2011, and 16% before 2000).

Below, I report my results split into "First-Time Candidates" (those who first ran in 2018 (or in a few cases, 2017) and "Experienced Candidates" (those who first ran in 2016 or earlier) in order to evaluate whether candidates who first sought office in the Year(s) of the Woman that

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[12] My sample reflects the overrepresentation of whites throughout American politics and local politics specifically. For example, whites compose a similarly high percentage of municipal council officeholders (89%) as they do candidates who responded to my county candidate survey (ICMA 2018).

[13] About a quarter of my sample ran in nonpartisan elections, most commonly for board of election offices (about half of my board of education candidates ran in non-partisan elections). To assign a party to as many in this dataset as possible, I constructed a variable that identifies a candidate as a Republican or Democrat first based on if they ran for office under that party label. If they did not, I then evaluate their ideological self-placement. Candidates who identified themselves at one of the three more conservative ideological positions on a seven-point scale are assigned a Republican identification, while those who self-identified as one of the three more liberal positions on that scale are assigned a Democratic identification. About 23% percent of my respondents who ran for nonpartisan offices *also* self-identified as the middle position on the seven-point ideology scale; these 40 respondents are excluded from calculations by party.

followed the 2016 election had different experiences than those who first ran in earlier elections. While it is possible that some of the differences I find are due to the fact that experienced candidates are also often experienced *officeholders* (62.6% of experienced candidates were incumbents in their 2018 campaigns), it is not the case that the first-time candidates in my sample are substantially inferior candidates to those with experience. While I am still gathering election outcome data for my Wave 1 national sample of candidates, in my Wave 2 sample, 64% of experienced candidates and 52% of first-time candidates who faced contested primaries in 2018 won them – a difference that is not statistically significant. Incumbency advantage does affect general election win rates, as 86% of experienced candidates compared to 44% of first-time candidates who made it to general elections won their general election. However, although experienced candidates had more electoral success, the first-time candidates in my sample nevertheless performed very well electorally. This provides at least some suggestion that differences I find between first-time and experienced candidates are not simply because first-time candidates are of lower quality. In fact, my examination of the specific qualifications and experiences of my candidates below demonstrates that most first-time candidates were very well-prepared to seek office before they ran. Of course, it is also possible that differences between the reported experiences of first-time and experienced candidates may be due to the time over which more experienced candidates are being asked to recall their experiences. As I expand this research for my book manuscript, I will compare the responses of candidates with more recent first-runs (e.g., 20% of my surveyed candidates ran for office first between 2014 and 2016) to their 2018 counterparts and to those who first ran further in the past in order to gain more clarity on the potential reasons for differences between first-time and experienced candidates in my sample. I will also draw on time series survey data from state legislative candidates collected during several campaigns to evaluate the robustness of my local candidate data analyses.

Who Runs for County Office and Why?

Candidate Backgrounds and Ideology

There are many similarities between the candidates who sought local office for the first time *after* the 2016 elections and the experienced 2018 candidates who first ran for office in 2016 or before. First-time candidates are no more racially diverse than experienced candidates. They are equally (very) likely to be married and to have children, and they have similar income levels. However, there are also some differences. First-time candidates are younger than experienced candidates and are more likely to have at least one young child at home. First-time candidates are also slightly more educated than experienced candidates.

The most notable differences, however – the differences that clearly set apart local candidates who sought office for the first time after the 2016 elections – relate to candidate gender and ideology. First, my data demonstrate that 2018 was a Year of the Woman not only at higher levels of office, but also at the local level. While women composed 34% of the experienced candidates seeking office in 2018, they composed 44% of the first-time candidates running that year. This increase in women's candidacy rates is not present in administrative position contests, nor in board of education campaigns – both contexts in which women have traditionally composed a fairly high proportion of elected officials. Rather, women's increased presence among first-time versus experienced candidates is driven by their runs for an office where women generally hold very few seats, but that is also the most powerful in my sample: county legislatures. While women made up only 23% of the experienced candidates for county legislatures in 2018, they composed 42% of first-time county legislative candidates.[14] In fact, in 2018, women composed a slightly smaller proportion of first-time (41%) than experienced (45%) board of education candidates, and their representation among county administrative candidates was almost identical across experience levels. So, this suggests that in this Year of the Woman, women increased their pursuit of more influential political offices and did not focus on the positions where they have traditionally more often been represented.

Even with this growth in women running, however, women continue to have somewhat different backgrounds than men running. In particular, as in higher levels of office (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013), women candidates for county offices are less likely than their male counterparts to be married and are less likely than men to have young children (a difference that is statistically significant only for experienced candidates). Additionally, a higher proportion of women than men candidates identify with a racial or ethnic minority group, a difference that is particularly stark – and statistically significant – among first-time candidates, among whom 11% of men and 18% of women are racial or ethnic minorities.

Additionally, just as 2018 was more accurately the Year of the *Democratic* Woman for state and federal candidates, the same pattern holds at the local level. Among Republicans, women composed approximately the same proportion of experienced (26%) and first time (24%) candidates. In contrast, among Democrats, women were a clear majority (60%) of first-time candidates while only a minority (42%) of experienced candidates – a difference of nearly 20 percentage points!

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[14] This increase in women candidates is also evident when examining previous data on women's representation in county offices. In my collection of data about who holds county legislative offices in 2008, I found that women composed only 17% of a national sample of county legislators (Crowder-Meyer 2010), and a 2014 survey of counties reported that men hold an average of 5 county commission seats on the average 6 member county commission (ICMA 2014) – both figures consistent with the 23% of experienced county legislative candidates who are women, but substantially lower than the 42% of first-time county legislative candidates who are women.

In addition to shifting the gender composition of those seeking office, 2018's first-time candidates also shifted the average ideology of county candidates to the left. Specifically, the average ideology of experienced candidates in 2018 was 4.6 on a 7-point scale (with lower numbers indicating more liberal ideology), while first-time candidates had an average ideology of 4.1 (this difference is significant at p=0.00).[15] Who drove this leftward shift? The surge of women candidates running for the first time in 2018. While experienced women candidates in my sample are more liberal than experienced men, this gap in average ideology is only 0.7, while the same gap among first-time candidates is twice as large: 1.4 on a 7-point scale. This difference reflects both that women first-time candidates were far more likely than women experienced candidates to run as Democrats and that among first-time candidates in non-partisan elections (a fairly small percentage of those in my data), women's ideology is substantially more liberal (2.9) than men's (4.8) – a gap nearly four times as large as the ideology gap between men and women experienced candidates. In sum, as more women candidates sought office in 2018, and particularly because they ran mostly as Democrats, the first-time candidates available to voters became more female and more liberal than their experienced candidate counterparts.

Candidate Experience and Qualifications

In 2018, there were increases in the number of candidates seeking office generally – a surge not just in how many women ran, but (at least at the federal level) in how many men ran as well (Dittmar 2018). Did this surge indicate that candidates from a wider variety of paths were inspired to seek political office? Did the 2018 elections provide opportunities for candidates *without* traditional political backgrounds or experiences to run for office, or did the candidates who emerged in 2018 largely share the same experiences and qualifications as those who first sought office in previous years? To answer these questions, I asked my survey respondents to identify whether or not they had been "active in their communities and politics" in a variety of ways before they ran for office for the very first time. Table 1 displays the proportion of men and women first-time and experienced candidates who indicated they had participated in each of this list of activities prior to ever running for office.

Looking first at the total number of activities in which candidates participated we see that while first-time and experienced candidates participated in a similar number of the total list of activities, first-time candidates report engaging in a higher number of political activities prior to running than did their experienced counterparts (a distinction that is driven by candidates for

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[15] Of course, it is possible that some of this gap in ideology may be due to more liberal candidates in past elections losing and declining to run again, while less liberal candidates were more successful in past elections and thus sought office again as experienced candidates. I am currently gathering data on victory rates of the candidates in my sample which will at least enable me to determine whether more liberal candidates were punished at the ballot box by voters in 2018.

boards of education and county legislatures, not county administrative positions, and by Democratic candidates not Republican candidates). This suggests that the new candidates who emerged to run for office for the first time in 2018 were not, in fact, coming from non-traditional pathways. Rather, these new candidates were as politically active or more active before they ran than were local candidates who first sought office in previous elections.

Table 1. Levels of Community and Political Experience Prior to Initial Candidacy

	Experienced Candidates		First-Time Candidates	
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
Regularly vote	99.7%	99.4%	100.0%	98.3%
Regularly contact elected officials	57.8%	58.6%	57.0%	70.1%*
Attend political march	25.9%	43.1%*	27.4%	58.0%*
Boycott company for political reason	24.9%	29.6%	34.0%	57.4%*
Volunteer for campaign organization	56.4%	57.6%	49.3%	58.6%
Attend candidate training	31.1%	36.6%	28.7%	43.2%*
Hold leadership position in political or community org	70.4%	67.1%	62.3%	63.1%
Volunteer for community/civic group	85.3%	83.9%	78.8%	79.7%
Volunteer for religious org	69.3%	79.9%*	70.5%	61.7%
Total activities reported on average (of 9)	5.03	5.28	4.90	5.62*
Total political activities reported on average (of 7)	3.54	3.70	3.45	4.30*

Note: Table displays the proportion of men and women among experienced and first-time candidates who reported participating in each activity "before [they] ran for office for the very first time," and the total number of activities and of political activities each type of candidate reported participating in on average. Statistical significance of t-tests comparing men and women within each category of candidates indicated by *p<0.05, † p<0.1

Comparing candidate experiences by gender demonstrates that the 2016 elections did not shift men's and women's perceptions of what qualifications are necessary before one seeks office. Research on state legislators finds that women are more likely than men to have served in their parties before running for legislature and more likely to have attended a candidate training program (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). This pattern of men acquiring fewer qualifications

than women before seeking office holds among new candidates for local office in 2018. Specifically, looking at both total levels of activity and participation in political activities specifically, men report having engaged in a smaller number of activities than women prior to seeking office (p<.01). These differences do not reach statistical significance when examining only experienced candidates but do hold, and are significant at p<.01 for both total activities and political activities among first-time candidates. In short, among candidates seeking office for the first-time after the 2016 elections, men continue to possess fewer qualifications and relevant experiences than do women who run for local office. The 2018 Year of the Woman did not change this underlying pattern in candidates' backgrounds – rather, it produced a field of women candidates who were particularly well-qualified compared both to their male counterparts and to the men and women who had sought similar offices for the first time in previous years.

The new qualifications that women candidates accrued as they increased their preparation before standing for office in 2018 encompassed both traditional and less traditional forms of political engagement. Regarding political and community participation, while both experienced and first-time men and women candidates voted at similar (extremely high) rates before seeking office, women who ran for the first time in 2018 were much more likely than men to report they had regularly contacted elected officials prior to their candidacy – a gender difference that did not exist among experienced candidates. While among experienced candidates, women were more likely than men to report having attended a political march and boycotted companies for political reasons, this difference was much larger among first-time candidates. Similarly, while among experienced candidates, men and women volunteered on campaigns and received campaign training equally often before running, among first-time candidates, women are more likely than men to have attended a candidate training (p=.02) and equally or more likely than men (p=.14) to have volunteered on a campaign. Thus, women who ran for the first time in 2018 were particularly likely to have bolstered their political engagement through contacting elected officials, marching, and boycotting, and to have prepared for their campaigns by attending candidate trainings than their male counterparts, and more likely to have done all but the latter than women who first sought office prior to 2018.

This political path to candidacy appears to distinguish 2018's first-time women candidates more than a community-based path to candidacy. Among both experienced and first-time candidates, women and men were equally likely to have volunteered for community organizations or civic groups or have held a leadership position in a community or political organization, and while women volunteered for religious organizations more than men before seeking office among experienced candidates, the reverse is true for first-time candidates, among whom men were equally or more likely than women (p=.13) to volunteer in religious groups before their candidacy. This marks a shift from the candidate emergence process commonly

described in the literature. While women have typically been more likely than men to emerge as candidates through a less traditional path (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013), my 2018 candidate data demonstrates that this pattern is shifting, as new women candidates accrue more political experiences and qualifications before seeking office than those who ran in the past.

Who Inspires County Candidates to Seek Office?

Ample literature suggests that recruitment is critical to the development of political ambition (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Crowder-Meyer 2018). My data reveals the importance of encouragement to the emergence of candidates for county offices. In Table 2, I display the percentage of candidates who reported they were encouraged to run by each of 20 possible people or groups when they first ran for the office they sought in 2018 (whether that was in 2018 or in a previous year), splitting candidates by gender and political experience. Table 2 demonstrates that candidates seeking county offices were encouraged to run by a wide variety of sources. Before running, the average candidate was encouraged by between six and nine sources (see bottom row of Table 2) and discouraged to run by less than one source (data not shown here).

Personal sources of encouragement dominate the political recruitment process for county candidates. Almost every candidate in my data reported that before they first sought the office they ran for in 2018, they were encouraged to run by a friend. In fact, across men and women and first-time and experienced candidates, a majority of candidates reported they were encouraged to run by a friend, a significant other, and another member of their family. A majority of all but one category of candidates also reported having been encouraged to run by a co-worker or employer.

Importantly, my research also shows that political recruiters are very active in recruiting candidates – even at the local level. About two-thirds or more of candidates in my study report being encouraged to run by sitting politicians as well as leaders in their political party. Ideological interest or community groups were also key recruiters of county candidates – with about half of candidates reporting they were encouraged to run by such groups. That such a substantial portion of those who chose to run were recruited – and by such a diverse and broad set of sources – suggests that recruitment continues to be key for candidate emergence, and even for emergence for offices like county legislature, board of education, and county clerk.

While recruitment to run is common across all candidates, my data also reveal some important distinctions in how encouragement shapes men's and women's emergence as candidates and in how the sources of encouragement shifted between candidates who first sought office before and during the 2018 Year of the Woman. Table 3 displays the gap in how many men or women among experienced or first-time candidates reported encouragement from a given

source (first and second columns) as well as how the proportion of men or women being encouraged by a specific source changes when comparing experienced men and women who first responded to encouragement to run before 2018 with their counterparts among first-time candidates (third and fourth columns).

Table 2. Encouragement to Run Prior to First Candidacy for Office Sought in 2018

	Experienced Candidates		First-Time Candidates	
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
Friend	81.4%	90.3%	88.0%	90.5%
Spouse/Significant other	63.9%	73.7%	65.0%	79.8%
Another family member	58.8%	66.7%	69.4%	74.8%
Co-worker or employer	47.2%	60.2%	56.2%	62.7%
Leaders in your party	65.2%	67.3%	63.4%	77.8%
Sitting politicians	71.4%	68.1%	63.6%	65.2%
Ideological interest/comm groups	41.4%	55.5%	45.4%	56.5%
Business or professional groups	42.2%	41.7%	46.5%	39.8%
Labor unions	10.0%	13.3%	6.8%	16.7%
Teacher associations or unions	18.2%	22.3%	16.8%	26.2%
Veterans groups	15.9%	17.3%	12.6%	13.9%
Women's groups	14.9%	43.8%	14.3%	59.4%
Agriculture or farmers groups	21.8%	19.5%	16.4%	15.5%
Religious or church groups	25.0%	30.0%	36.8%	25.5%
Civil rights or racial/ethnic minority groups	11.8%	28.0%	22.4%	36.3%
School or child groups	25.2%	40.8%	28.4%	36.8%
Other interest or community groups	34.7%	41.7%	37.1%	41.0%
Political donors or donor groups	29.5%	32.3%	29.2%	39.3%
Formal candidate training program	8.1%	16.9%	10.7%	34.6%
Other	13.2%	33.3%	25.0%	27.3%
Total political encouragers (average)	3.9	4.7	4.3	5.6
Total personal encouragers (average)	2.4	2.9	2.7	3.0
Total number of encouragers (average)	6.3	7.7	6.9	8.6

Note: Table displays the proportion of men and women among experienced and first-time candidates who reported encouragement to run by a given group the first time they ran for the office they sought in 2018, and the total number of sources of encouragement reported by each type of candidate on average.

Table 3. Differences in Encouragement to Run by Gender and Experience

	Gender Difference (Women - Men)		Experience Difference (First-time - Experienced)	
	Experienced Candidates	First-Time Candidates	Men	Women
Friend	8.9*	2.5	6.6†	0.2
Spouse/Significant other	9.9*	14.8*	1.1	6.1
Another family member	7.9	5.4	10.6*	8.1
Co-worker or employer	12.9*	6.5	9.0†	2.6
Leaders in your party	2.2	14.3*	-1.7	10.4†
Sitting politicians	-3.4	1.6	-7.8†	-2.8
Ideological interest/comm groups	14.1*	11.1†	4.0	1.0
Business or professional groups	-0.5	-6.7	4.3	-1.9
Labor unions	3.3	9.9*	-3.2	3.4
Teacher associations or unions	4.1	9.4†	-1.4	3.9
Veterans groups	1.4	1.3	-3.3	-3.5
Women's groups	28.9*	45.1*	-0.6	15.6*
Agriculture or farmers groups	-2.3	-0.9	-5.4	-4.0
Religious or church groups	5.0	-11.3†	11.8*	-4.5
Civil rights or racial/ethnic minority groups	16.2*	13.9*	10.6*	8.2
School or child groups	15.6*	8.4	3.2	-4.0
Other interest or community groups	6.9	3.8	2.4	-0.7
Political donors or donor groups	2.8	10.1†	-0.3	7.0
Formal candidate training program	8.9*	23.9*	2.6	17.7*
Other	20.2†	2.3	11.8	-6.1
Diff in total political encouragers	0.9*	1.4*	0.4	0.9†
Diff in total personal encouragers	0.5*	0.3*	0.3†	0.1
Diff in total number of encouragers	1.4*	1.7*	0.6	0.9†

*Note: The first two columns of the table display the differences in the proportion of women and men among experienced (column 1) and first-time (column 2) candidates who reported encouragement to run by a given source the first time they ran for the office they sought in 2018. Positive numbers indicate women were encouraged by that source more than men. The last two columns display the difference in the proportion of first-time and experienced candidates who reported encouragement by a given source among men (column 3) and women (column 4). Positive numbers indicate first-time candidates were encouraged by that source more than experienced candidates. Differences significant at *p<0.05, † p<0.1*

The positive numbers throughout the first two columns of Table 3 demonstrate that women are more likely than men to report having been encouraged to run by almost all 20 sources I asked about in my survey. On average, among experienced candidates, women report they were encouraged by 1.4 more sources than men before they first sought the office they ran for in 2018; among first-time candidates, women were encouraged by 1.7 more sources than men before they ran. Because I am observing here rates of encouragement among people who eventually decided to run for office – rather than a broader sample of potential candidates who may not have chosen to run – this likely reflects *not* that women in the population are recruited more often than men (in fact, American women are less often recruited than men (Crowder-Meyer 2018)), but rather that it takes less encouragement to convince men they should run for office than it does to convince women that they should become candidates.

While other research has confirmed that men generally are more willing than women to run with less encouragement (e.g., Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013), my data reveal an interesting pattern in what kinds of groups recruit men and women and how this is changing over time. Among experienced county candidates (the first column in Table 3), women report more recruitment than men at statistically (and substantively) significant levels from ideological groups, women's groups, civil rights and racial or ethnic minority groups, school or child related groups, candidate training programs, and almost the full set of personal sources of encouragement: significant others, coworkers, and friends. In contrast, experienced women were statistically no more likely than experienced men to have been recruited by party organizations, politicians, business groups, labor groups, teacher associations or unions, veterans groups, agriculture groups, religious groups, donor groups, or family members.

Yet, when examining how men and women first-time candidates in 2018 were recruited (the second column in Table 3) – in other words, how candidate recruitment occurred largely following the 2016 election – the pattern shifts. For one thing, women's recruitment among first time candidates is no longer more dominated than men's by personal contacts: women are encouraged to run more than men by significant others but not by other family members, coworkers, or friends. Instead, women's greater recruitment than men among first-time candidates is coming from their recruitment by groups that traditionally hold political power (especially in the Democratic Party). First-time women candidates in 2018 were recruited more often than their male counterparts by party organizations, ideological groups, labor unions, teacher associations or unions, and donor groups. Only *one* of these actors (ideological groups) was a more common source of recruitment for experienced women over experienced men. This is not to say that women in 2018 were not being recruited by more typical advocates for women's representation – indeed, women first-time candidates were recruited more than men first-time candidates by women's groups and candidate training programs as well – and

recruitment levels from both types of groups were substantially (and statistically) higher for first-time women candidates than experienced women candidates. But, it does highlight that the groundwork for 2018's surge in women candidates was being laid by candidate recruiters in the lead-up to that election.

While many traditional sources of recruitment have not been focused on recruiting women candidates historically, in the years preceding the 2018 elections, political parties, donors, and other political insiders appear to have adjusted their focus in a way that increased how many women candidates received their encouragement and pursued local office. In contrast, when comparing the recruitment sources of first-time and experienced men candidates (the third column in Table 3), we see that while personal sources (family members, coworkers, and friends) and less explicitly political sources (religious or church groups) were more likely to be mentioned as sources of encouragement by men seeking office for the first-time in 2018 than experienced men candidates, male first-time candidates were actually *less* likely than experienced men to report encouragement to run from sitting politicians, and no more likely to report encouragement from party leaders (while party leader recruitment of women was more common among first-time than experienced candidates).

Of course, not every source of encouragement is equally compelling to a potential candidate considering whether or not to run for office. To determine whose recruitment was especially consequential to the emergence of my survey respondents' as political candidates, I asked each candidate to name and describe who was most influential in their decision to seek office for the first time – first among people they knew personally, and then among people they didn't know (e.g., a famous politician or role model). These open-ended responses were then classified to delineate encouragement from personal connections (spouses, other family members, co-workers, and friends) or political connections (party leaders, local, state, or national officeholders, and community leaders), and coded by the gender of the recruiter (determined by their first name or internet research about the individual).

I find that personal connections are most often mentioned as "most influential" to a candidate's decision to seek office: 76% of candidates listed a personal contact and 27% listed a political contact in response to this question. However, in keeping with the increased political recruitment activity I report above, first-time political candidates identify political connections as most important to their candidacy more often than experienced candidates (p=.01). This distinction is driven in part by women's likelihood, among first-time candidates, of prioritizing political contacts as their key recruiters. While among experienced candidates, women (22%) are slightly less likely than men (24%) to identify a political connection as most influential to their candidacy decision, among first-time candidates this is reversed as women (37%) are more likely than men (29%) to list a political contact as particularly influential. (This increase between

experienced and first-time women is statistically significant at p=.01.) In other words, it is not only the case that women running for the first time in 2018's Year of the Woman report being encouraged by more political sources than women who first ran before (Table 3, fourth column); this encouragement was also especially consequential for women first-time candidates who emerged to run in 2018.

My exploration of influential recruiters also offers the opportunity to see how often men and women are inspired to run by someone who shares their gender. Among personal contacts, I find few gendered patterns in who was a candidate's most important recruiter. Among those who listed a personal contact as their most important recruiter, men and women were equally likely to name a woman. On the other hand, among those who were most inspired to run by a *political* contact, gender distinctions are much more evident. Only 16% of men who named political contacts as key recruiters named a woman, while nearly half (47%) of women who named a political connection identified a woman as their most important encouragement to run. Given that men continue to compose much more than half of those in political offices and other prominent positions, this suggests that the women who do hold office or positions of leadership in their parties or communities are playing a particularly key role in inspiring women to run for political office.

This same pattern holds when I evaluate the famous politicians or role models – the individuals not personally known to my candidates – who influenced their decision to seek office for the first time. Men (11%) were far less likely than women (42%) to report having been inspired to run by a female role model. This gap was particularly large for experienced candidates, among whom less than 8% of men compared to 43% of women reported a woman inspired them to run. Interestingly, for men first seeking office in 2018, their likelihood of being inspired to run by a woman had increased. While a gender gap still remained, 19% of men and 40% of women first-time candidates in 2018 reported a woman role model inspired them to run.

How Are County Candidates Supported?

I revealed above that the women who sought office for the first time in 2018 emerged to candidacy at the behest of many recruiters – in particular, a much broader set of political recruiters than their male counterparts or than one would expect when examining the recruitment of women who first sought office in earlier elections. I have also shown that the women running for the first time in 2018 were extremely well-qualified – compared both to men first-time candidates and men and women who first ran for office previously. Given this, one might expect that new women candidates in 2018's Year of the Woman would be highly supported as they campaigned – both financially and more broadly. On the other hand, research suggests that women in municipal office are less likely than men to believe that party leaders would support

female recruits (Butler and Preece 2016), suggesting there may be reason to believe women candidates will receive less support than men.

To determine the extent to which local candidates received campaign support, I asked respondents to indicate which types of support they received during their 2018 campaign from party organizations and from community or interest groups, on a list of types of support including help meeting nomination requirements (e.g., getting petitions signed, raising filing fees), help with get out the vote efforts or canvassing, help with personal or family needs (e.g., childcare), direct financial contributions, and training on issues (e.g., county policy). Tables 4 and 5 display the percent of candidates, by gender and status as a first-time or experienced candidate, who received various forms of support from political parties (Table 4) and community or interest groups (Table 5) during their 2018 campaigns.

Women first-time candidates stand out in Tables 4 and 5 – in 2018, they were supported more frequently than other types of candidates across a wide variety of forms of support and by both political parties and community or interest groups. Comparing first-time candidates by gender reveals a stark distinction – more women than men reported receiving help from political parties meeting nomination requirements; help with get out the vote efforts; provision of volunteers; sharing mailing, voter, or donor lists; direct financial contributions; campaign advise, expertise, or strategy; and training on issues.[16] The pattern in group support is similar, with more women than men among first-time candidates receiving six of the ten forms of support I asked about from community or interest groups. However, women did not receive more support than men in 2018 across the board. When comparing experienced candidates, I find no statistically significant gender differences in reports of support from party organizations, and only one difference between men and women in group support (with more experienced *men* than experienced women receiving shared mailing, voter, or donor lists from community or interest groups). In all, women first-time candidates received the most support from party organizations – an average of 3.5 out of 10 possible types of support. Men and women experienced candidates were next in line, with an average of 2.5 forms of support each, and men first-time candidates received the fewest forms of support, at 2.2 forms on average. Community or interest group support rankings are similar, with women first-time candidates reporting an average of 2.4 forms of support, experienced men 2.1 forms, experienced women 1.8 forms, and first-time men 1.6 forms of support on average from groups during their 2018 campaigns.

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[16] More women than men also report receiving endorsements during both primaries and general election campaigns when applicable.

Table 4. Support from Party Organizations During 2018 Campaign

	Experienced Candidates			First-Time Candidates		
	Men	**Women**	*Diff. (W-M)*	**Men**	**Women**	*Diff. (W-M)*
Help meeting nomination requirements (petitions, fees)	18.1%	24.5%	*6.42*	18.8%	27.7%	*8.93[†]*
Help producing campaign materials	27.3%	24.1%	*-3.25*	18.3%	26.6%	*8.30*
Help with GOTV or canvassing	47.5%	52.1%	*4.64*	31.5%	52.7%	*21.21[*]*
Cosponsoring campaign events or fundraisers	29.0%	26.3%	*-2.75*	30.0%	35.1%	*5.14*
Providing volunteers	38.9%	39.6%	*0.64*	26.4%	38.5%	*12.14[*]*
Help with personal/family needs (e.g., childcare)	1.1%	0.0%	*-1.10*	3.6%	2.8%	*-0.77*
Sharing mailing, voter, or donor lists	36.2%	37.9%	*1.63*	34.7%	52.7%	*17.96[*]*
Direct financial contributions	22.7%	27.4%	*4.73*	20.6%	40.4%	*19.80[*]*
Campaign advice, expertise, or strategy	37.8%	36.0%	*-1.80*	44.5%	56.3%	*11.73[*]*
Training on issues (e.g., county policy)	13.7%	14.4%	*0.74*	14.2%	27.3%	*13.09[*]*
Total forms of support received on average (of 10)	2.5	2.5	*-0.07*	2.2	3.5	*1.26[*]*

Note: Table displays the proportion of men and women among experienced and first-time candidates who reported receiving each form of support from party organizations during their campaign in 2018 and the differences between women's and men's reported support among experienced candidates and first-time candidates. Positive numbers in the difference columns indicate women were supported by that source more than men. Differences significant at *p<0.05, † p<0.1

Table 5. Support from Community or Interest Groups During 2018 Campaign

	Experienced Candidates			First-Time Candidates		
	Men	**Women**	*Diff. (W-M)*	**Men**	**Women**	*Diff. (W-M)*
Help meeting nomination requirements (petitions, fees)	16.5%	13.4%	*-3.08*	13.4%	15.7%	*2.25*
Help producing campaign materials	23.6%	21.1%	*-2.53*	17.9%	17.3%	*-0.60*
Help with GOTV or canvassing	36.5%	31.7%	*-4.76*	28.0%	41.2%	*13.15**
Cosponsoring campaign events or fundraisers	23.7%	20.6%	*-3.10*	19.7%	29.0%	*9.30†*
Providing volunteers	34.9%	28.7%	*-6.22*	26.5%	40.8%	*14.26**
Help with personal/family needs (e.g., childcare)	4.7%	3.2%	*-1.50*	5.4%	3.8%	*-1.54*
Sharing mailing, voter, or donor lists	21.5%	12.2%	*-9.29**	12.4%	18.0%	*5.60*
Direct financial contributions	31.0%	38.8%	*7.75*	22.1%	34.3%	*12.15**
Campaign advice, expertise, or strategy	28.1%	26.0%	*-2.14*	26.5%	41.2%	*14.66**
Training on issues (e.g., county policy)	13.1%	7.9%	*-5.22*	11.5%	20.6%	*9.14†*
Total forms of support received on average (of 10)	2.1	1.8	*-0.24*	1.6	2.4	*0.81**

Note: Table displays the proportion of men and women among experienced and first-time candidates who reported receiving each form of support from community or interest groups during their campaign in 2018 and the differences between women's and men's reported support among experienced candidates and first-time candidates. Positive numbers in the difference columns indicate women were supported by that source more than men. Differences significant at *p<0.05, † p<0.1

The women who emerged to run for county office for the first time in 2018's Year of the Woman are different from their male counterparts and the women who emerged before them. My data on their recruitment to candidacy demonstrates that they emerged as a part of the traditional political machine in a way more similar to men candidates. My findings regarding the support they earned corroborates this conclusion. New women candidates did not lose the group support

that has been key to women's candidacies for many decades (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013) – they achieved similar (or higher) levels of support from community and interest groups as experienced women candidates, and more than their male first-time candidate counterparts across most forms of support. But they *also* bolstered this group support with support from a traditional political power player – dominating the race for support from party organizations as well. Consider for example that 40% of women first-time candidates reported receiving direct financial contributions from a party organization, compared to 27% of experienced women, 23% of experienced men, and 21% of first-time men seeking office. Indeed, the women seeking office for the first time in 2018 were prepared – not just to contest their elections, but also to govern – they received training on issues like county policy about twice as often as any of the other candidates running in 2018. They were politically engaged, highly qualified, serious candidates – and in 2018, it appears this was recognized not only by community and interest groups but also by party organizations.[17]

Progressive Ambition Among County Candidates

The women seeking office in 2018 – whether first-time or experienced candidates – were generally more qualified than their male counterparts, were encouraged to run at least as often as men, and received at least as much support from parties and groups as men. This should stand women in good stead when it comes to successfully competing for and winning local elected offices. But what comes next? Literature suggests that traditionally, men have been more likely than women to run for office in order to pursue a political career and increasingly powerful positions, rather than to solve particular policy problems (which may or may not involve moving into higher offices). Does this hold among the candidates who ran for county office in 2018? Does it hold for the men and women who sought office for the first time in this new Year of the Woman? To answer these questions, I asked candidates to indicate which offices they hoped to run for in the future and provided a list of positions from various local offices through governor and US Congress. In Table 6 I display the proportion of men and women candidates for county administrative, board of education, and county legislative positions who reported ambition to run for at least one state or federal office (this includes state legislature, governor, and US Congress) and for any other office (local through federal) in the future.[18]

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[17] Who were the most important supporters of men and women who ran in 2018? In the book chapter that builds from this section of this paper, I will answer this question, drawing on responses to an open ended question asking my local candidate respondents to list any organizations or groups that were particularly important supporters of their 2018 campaign. I will also discuss these data separated by party; as one might expect, support for women candidates in 2018 differed within the Democratic and Republican parties.

[18] For board of education and county legislative candidates I exclude the office they are currently seeking in measuring their progressive ambition – they are coded as having ambition if they hope to run for any other office than board of education or county legislature respectively. For county administrative candidates, I exclude the

Table 6. Ambition for State, Federal, or Any Other Office

	All Candidates		Experienced Candidates		First-Time Candidates	
	Men	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**	**Women**
County Administrative Position Candidates						
State/federal office ambition	16.7%	3.0%*	13.5%	4.5%	23.5%	0.0%*
Any other office ambition	27.8%	9.1%*	21.6%	11.4%	41.2%	4.8%*
Board of Education Candidates						
State/federal office ambition	15.2%	9.7%	11.3%	9.1%	20.5%	11.1%
Any other office ambition	33.7%	20.8%†	28.3%	18.2%	41.0%	25.9%
County Legislative Candidates						
State/federal office ambition	18.5%	16.7%	15.7%	13.1%	25.0%	20.0%
Any other office ambition	27.8%	28.8%	23.0%	24.6%	38.5%	32.9%

Note: Table displays the proportion of men and women among all, experienced, and first-time candidates in 2018 who reported they hoped to run in the future for a state or federal office (US Congress, Governor, State legislature) or at least one of a list of any other offices than the one they currently sought. Figures are separated by the office a candidate was running for in 2018. Statistical significance of gender differences in ambition indicated by *p<0.05, † p<0.1

Although men candidates in 2018 have no reason to display greater ambition than women who ran that year (given their lower overall qualifications, and equal or lower rates of encouragement to run and support from parties and groups), men nevertheless display similar or higher rates of ambition as women. Specifically, among candidates for county administrative offices (e.g., county clerk), very few women (3%) hope to seek state or federal office, while 17% of men report they hope to do so, and while only 9% of women hope to seek any other office, 28% of men hope to do so (both differences are statistically significant at p<.01). Gender differences in ambition decrease as we move to other offices. Among candidates for board of education, about 10% of women and 15% of men hope to seek state or federal offices (a difference that is not statistically significant at conventional levels), while 21% of women and 34% of men hope to seek any other office (p=.07). Finally, among county legislative candidates, progressive ambition is similar by gender – 17% of women and 19% of men aim to seek state or

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category of offices in which their current position would fit - "other county office" – as I did not separately ask ambition to run for each individual office among the variety that could be included in county administrative positions (e.g., county clerk, county register, county register of deeds, etc.). Thus, county administrative candidates are coded as displaying ambition to run for any other office if they indicated they hope to run for any office other than "other county office."

federal office in the future, and 29% of women and 28% of men hope to seek any other office in a future year. Interestingly, the proportion of men who hope to run for a higher office is very similar across offices – men seem to see county administrative, board of education, and county legislative offices as steps on a political career ladder to state or federal office at pretty similar rates. In contrast, women who run for county administrative positions seem to consider those a terminal position – with very few aiming to run for state or federal office – while women are more likely to consider board of education and especially county legislative offices as pipeline positions on which future candidacies for higher offices could be built.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an initial look at the characteristics, backgrounds, recruitment, campaign experiences, and progressive ambition of candidates for county office in 2018. Drawing on original data from a survey of candidates for county legislative, administrative, and board of education offices, I investigated several questions which will form the basis of chapters in a broader book manuscript: Who runs for local office and why?, Who inspires candidates to emerge?, To what extent are local candidates supported during campaigns?, and How much ambition do county candidates have to move through the political pipeline to other offices?

I identified a number of similarities and differences between men and women county candidates, and between candidates who first ran during the 2018 Year of the Woman and their more experienced predecessors. While women who emerged to run post-2016 are similar to their predecessors in some ways – for example, running with a wider set of qualifications than their male counterparts and based on a larger amount of encouragement from diverse sources – in other ways, the post-2016 landscape differs. Women who first sought office during this new Year of the Woman were recruited not only by personal sources (a dominant source of recruitment for more experienced women relative to experienced men candidates), but also by many political actors. In fact, women first-time candidates reported more recruitment by traditional sources of political power – such as parties, labor unions, and donors – than men, a pattern quite different from that identified by experienced candidates. This recruitment was also backed by support during campaigns. Women first-time candidates in 2018 received more types of support from both interest or community groups and political parties than did their male counterparts or more experienced candidates.

In other words, the first set of elections following 2016 seem to be laying a new pattern for women candidates' emergence and campaign experiences. It is not yet clear whether this pattern will continue in future election years – particularly if gender is less salient in those years

than in 2018 – but my findings do indicate that 2018 was an unusual year for women's representation at the local level as well as higher levels of office.[19]

Men's and women's experiences in 2018 may also have consequences for the offices they seek in the future. While I find some gender differences in progressive ambition among the candidates I survey (with men expressing more ambition to seek other offices than women, particularly among county administrative office candidates), among the men and women who ran for county legislature in 2018, I find no gender differences in their hopes to run for other offices in the future. Thus, it is possible that the unusual amounts of recruitment and support received by women candidates in 2018 will form the foundation for more equal political ambition by gender in the future.

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[19] As at higher levels of office, this is particularly the case within the Democratic party. I did not discuss party differences in this paper for space reasons, but will do so extensively in the book manuscript that builds on this research.

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