

The instrumental office: Making a difference through elected office

Patrick Meehan
University of Michigan

Shauna Shames
Rutgers University - Camden

Abstract

This paper uses the results of interviews with 65 individuals across two areas of the United States to develop a survey experiment of 590 American adults on their interest in running for a hypothetical seat on city council. Our experiment frames elected office as either an instrument for personal ambition, or as an instrument for making a difference. We also test a new measure we call political primacy, which asks respondents to rank elected office as a way of making a difference relative to alternatives. Results suggest that using elected office as an instrument for making a difference increases interest in running for office significantly more than using it as an instrument for personal ambition, contrary to much of the candidate emergence literature. In addition, ranking elected office as the best instrument for making a difference is the single greatest predictor of interest in running for office. Implications for the study of candidate emergence are discussed.

Introduction

Given the vitriol in this year's Presidential election, it is fair to ask why anyone would run for office. Indeed, the question has been asked (Lawless & Fox 2005; Lawless & Fox 2010; Lawless & Fox 2015; Shames 2017), with the understanding that individuals who run for office are entering a pugilistic "arena" (Fox & Lawless 2004). It is not simply the prospect of facing political animosity that dissuades individuals from running; when asked, many practical explanations are given for avoiding elected office. Among successful attorneys, for example, elected office represents a drastic cut in pay that, for individuals with children, represents a significant sacrifice (Lawless 2012). Similarly, running for and serving in office takes time away from family, which is asking too much of many people (Fulton et al 2006). Setting aside practical concerns, people often express displeasure with various aspects of campaigning and governing. Selling oneself to voters, soliciting donations, making tough compromises—these are parts of office-holding many can do without (Shames 2017).

And yet, there are those who run. What do we make of these individuals? Given the popular association of politics with quasi gladiatorial combat, early attempts to explain why people run for office relied on an over-abundance of masculinity (McConaughy 1950; DiRenzo 1967; Hedlund 1973), or a lust for power (Browning & Jacob 1964; Browning 1968). In addition to the crudeness of measuring such concepts, the presence of women in politics poses a problem to the persuasiveness of such explanations. Ambition, on the other hand, represents a less martial character trait of those who pursue elected office, and has consequently enjoyed considerable attention in what is known as candidate emergence (Schlesinger 1966; Swinerton 1968; Prewitt & Nowlin 1969; Mezey 1970; Engstrom 1971; Fishel 1971; Black 1972; Levine & Hyde 1977; Rohde 1979; Brace 1984; Hibbing 1986; Loomis 1988; Fowler & McClure 1989; Ehrenhalt 1992; Hall & van Houweling 1995; Gaddie 2004; Fox & Lawless 2005; Maestas et al 2006).

Intuitively, ambition makes sense. No other characteristic affixes itself as firmly to our Presidential candidates as ambition. But dig deeper and ambition as an explanation for candidate emergence becomes problematic. To begin with, what does ambition mean? Or, put another way, how do we recognize when someone has it? Running for office cannot be used as evidence of ambition because it is not falsifiable. Yet this is exactly what the candidate emergence literature has done (Schlesinger 1966; Black 1972; Levine & Hyde 1977; Rohde 1979; Fowler & McClure 1989; Maestas et al 2006). There must be a way of measuring or observing an individual's ambition that is independent of her running for office. The only such measure subjected to empirical scrutiny comes from Richard Fox's and Jennifer Lawless' Citizen Political Ambition Study. In this study of 3,765 lawyers, business professionals, educators, and interest group activists, ambition was measured two ways: (1) the importance of rising to the top of one's profession; and (2) the importance of earning a lot of money. As it happens, when these measures were regressed on an individual's interest in running for office, no significant relationship was found (Fox & Lawless 2005).

So despite our intuitive understanding that ambition matters to running for office, little actually connects the two. Why should rising to the top of one's profession or earning a lot of money

correlate with an individual's interest in running for office? Either one or both can be achieved entirely outside of elected office.

In an effort to better understand how individuals think about elected office, and how ambition may or may not fit into their descriptions, we conducted interviews with 65 individuals across two political environments: Boston and Southeast Michigan. We were selective in who we interviewed. Similar to Fox and Lawless (2004), the individuals recruited for interviews had to be in degree fields or professions that typically lead to elected office. In Boston, fifty-five interviews were conducted with graduate students attending Harvard University Law School, Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, and Suffolk University Law School. In Southeast Michigan, ten individuals were interviewed who were either elected to local office, had served as a party precinct delegate, or were politically active in the community.

The interviews were semi-structured, and subjects were asked to imagine themselves running for office, if they had not already done so, and to express their sentiments toward politics generally. The responses we received revealed important insights into how possible candidates thought about elected office.

The most revealing of these insights was that, without being prompted, many subjects freely associated change with politics. This may not seem surprising on its own. Regarding people coming together on issues they care about, Charity, a Suffolk University law student, had this to say:

I think that in many cases politics is very good because a group of people can get together and push forward an agenda to make a serious change, and people may agree or disagree as to whether that's a good change, but I think the political process is a good thing and the ability to effect change is a very good thing.

The kind of change Charity is referring to is so ubiquitous in political speeches that it is often taken for granted. However, it was not simply the association of politics with change that was revealing. Our subjects went further and suggested that politics, and specifically elected office, is often the *instrument* of change. Take, for instance, what Chloe, a Harvard law student, had to say about the effect running for office can have on issue awareness:

I think [elected office]'s definitely a position where you can make a great impact...I think even just in running, you can present some issues that other people may not be talking about and change the public view on what they should be thinking about versus what they actually are.

There is little ambiguity about the way Chloe is describing elected office, or even running for office. To her, candidacies are instruments for communicating issues individuals care about. Eli, a Suffolk student, echoes this sentiment, but frames his thinking about elected office in terms of helping others:

One of the reasons I'd like to [run for office] would be to effectuate change, is to help people.

Again, there is little ambiguity about Eli's meaning. Elected office is the instrument for creating change that helps people. The instrumental power of elected office to make change has been hiding in plain sight for some time. Two of the most recent Presidential campaign slogans are an implicit acknowledgment of the instrumental power of the Presidency to make change. In 2008, Sen. Barack Obama offered his candidacy as "change you can believe in." The unspoken message was that by using the office of the President, Barack Obama could enact change we could believe in. Similarly, in 2016, Donald Trump promises to "make America great again." It is, of course, by using the office of the President that he can accomplish this goal.

Tom, a township trustee in Southeast Michigan, is helpful in comparing the instrumental power of elected office to alternative forms of political activism:

There's a huge difference between trying to influence the direction of your government and being in the government and actually helping draft the ordinance, helping persuade your fellow board members to push it through, or finding, you know, the slate on the board that you can live with and vote, and being an activist is great, I've never been an activist, but to actually vote and pass the laws is a hell of a lot better.

For Tom, elected office is a better instrument—a hell of a lot better, to borrow his language—for making change in the community than other forms of political activism. Rhonda, a school board member in Southeast Michigan, spoke about her decision to run for school board in relation to what she had already been doing as a parent:

I wanted to go to school board meetings and I wanted to have my voice heard, and I wanted to be active, but once I saw how I could switch my role from just being a parent community member to then being really an influential person who can impact lots of students, which is really what I wanted to do anyway, it seemed logical for me, and it seemed like a really good fit.

Once Rhonda recognized that a seat on the school board provided her with a more powerful instrument than attending school board meetings, it "seemed logical" to her to pursue one of those seats.

Importantly, not everyone we interviewed was convinced of the instrumental power of elected office. Some, like Cindy, a Suffolk student, expressed dissatisfaction with the political system in general:

I feel like [politics] doesn't get much done...No matter who's in office things just aren't going to get done.

Others, like Irene, a social worker in Southeast Michigan, were willing to say that elected office was not any more powerful an instrument for making change than alternatives:

I think there have been occasions, don't ask me to come up with a specific, where a single private person member of the community, resident, you know has brought an issue that is very important and they've spearheaded, you know, community action and grass roots, and they've accomplished stuff outside of council.

The varying regard for the instrumental power of elected office expressed in our interviews was promising, and ultimately what was most revealing about our interviews. It was possible that in

their regard for elected office our interview subjects were expressing a sentiment that distinguished likely candidates from un-likely candidates. In this respect it was also revealing that they did not discuss ambition. If ambition did come up, it was in the context of what they did not like about politicians. But no one we spoke with associated a desire to rise to the top of their profession, or a desire to make a lot of money, with elected office, in the way Fox and Lawless (2005) measure ambition.

But perhaps our interview subjects were simply being coy. Perhaps when they referred to elected office as an instrument for making change they were really referring to elected office as an instrument for their own ambition. We do not find this likely, but have to account for the possibility, given that so much of the candidate emergence literature has centered on ambition as the explanation for running for office (Schlesinger 1966; Black 1972; Rohde 1979; Loomis 1988; Fowler & McClure 1989; Ehrenhalt 1992; Gaddie 2004; Fox & Lawless 2005). After all, the same logic that makes elected office a powerful instrument for achieving change can be applied to elected office as a powerful instrument for achieving ambition—namely, that it is better than available alternatives.

What is needed is a test to determine if our interpretation of our interview subjects is correct—that elected office as an instrument for making change is a powerful motivator for running for office—or if elected office is simply an instrument of one's personal ambition. The most optimal form of this test would be an experiment.

Survey Experiment

Candidate emergence is particularly difficult to study because it exists on a very long time horizon, punctuated by the seemingly sudden decision to run for office. Those who never make the decision to run for office are difficult to observe, and difficult to distinguish from everyone else. Vice President Joe Biden's contemplation of running for President, only to publicly announce that he was not running, represents one of the rare instances in which we know for certain an individual was considering a candidacy and chose not to run.

In the absence of being able to observe an individual's decision to run directly, we are left with observing antecedent decision-making. The practice of observing an individual's *interest* in running for office has become acceptable in the candidate emergence literature as antecedent to an eventual candidacy (Fox, Lawless, & Feeley 2001; Fox & Lawless 2003; Fox & Lawless 2004; Fox & Lawless 2005; Fox & Lawless 2011). We would expect to find candidates from among the pool of individuals who are interested in running for office, although this pool is larger than the pool of individuals who *will* eventually run for office.

Consequently, our experiment must establish which instrumental orientation matters to an individual's interest in running for office: as an instrument for making change, or as an instrument for achieving ambition.

To do this, we designed a control condition that was as favorable, and controlled for as many additional factors that weigh on an individual's decision to run, as possible. That started with situating elected office at the local level. Fox and Lawless (2005) note that most individuals who go into politics start at the local level. Additionally, if Lawless' (2012) survey of elected officials is to be believed, 96 percent of elected officials in the United States serve locally, meaning at the county level or below. It makes sense to suggest serving at the level of government that represents 96 percent of elected officials. More importantly, for most people local government operates at orders of magnitude smaller than state and federal government. The financial costs of mounting a campaign for local government, for example, are considerably smaller than for state or federal government (Fleischmann & Stein 1998). The time commitment, in terms of campaigning and office-holding, is not as great at the local level as either the state or federal level. People generally have a higher regard for local government than they do for either state or federal government (DeHoog et al 1990; Lassen & Serritzlew 2011), so the suggestion of serving in local government should not engender cynicism and distrust in the same way it might if we were to suggest serving in state or federal government.

Our control condition further controlled for political recruitment. Much of the literature on candidate emergence recognizes the importance of recruitment to an individual's decision to run for office (Jacob 1962; Schwartz 1969; Goodman et al 1970; Hunt & Pendley 1972; Tobin & Keynes 1975; Sabonmatsu 2002; Maestas et al 2005; Fox & Lawless 2010; Cheng & Tavits 2011; Brockman et al 2014). For individuals who are on the fence about running, the encouragement of others can help them to agree to run (Sabonmatsu 2002; Maestas et al 2005). Because many

local elections are non-partisan, we did not specify where the recruitment was coming from, simply that people close to the respondent have encouraged her to run.

Lastly, our control condition controlled for the political environment, specifically that the election was for an open seat on city council. Considerable research on incumbency advantage shows that quality challengers generally shy away from running against incumbents (Jacobson & Kernell 1981; Bianco 1984; Adams & Squire 1997; Stone & Maisel 2003; Basinger & Ensley 2007). Open seats, on the other hand, are much more hospitable to prospective candidates, primarily because individuals feel as though their likelihood of winning has increased (Jacobson & Kernell 1981; Stone & Maisel 2003). We speak directly to the probability of winning by supplying respondents with a figure on their likelihood of winning a seat on city council.

The full control script is as follows:

Several members of your local city council are retiring at the end of their current terms.

Studies show that candidates for open city council seats are successful more than 60 percent of the time.

People close to you have suggested you should run for one of the open seats.

We then asked respondents to indicate how interested they were in running for one of the open seats on city council on a scale from 1 to 4, 1 being “not at all interested,” 4 being “very interested.”

Having established a control frame, we devised how to characterize elected office as an instrument for making change, as well as an instrument for personal ambition.

Regarding ambition, it was necessary to distill ambition down to things elected office could provide the individual that were not policy- or change-related. We determined that when people associate ambition with elected office—devoid of any policy considerations—they are usually thinking of self-aggrandizement. Self-aggrandizement itself is perhaps a feeling about one’s “status” compared to others, as well as their name recognition in the broader public. We feel it can be argued that elected office can be an *instrument* for status and name recognition, on its own, and that this is what people mean when they associate ambition with elected office.

Our ambition frame, therefore, reads as follows:

Several members of your local city council are retiring at the end of their current terms.

Studies show that candidates for open city council seats are successful more than 60 percent of the time.

People close to you have suggested you should run for one of the open seats.

One of the retiring city council members said, “I’m really glad I ran because having a seat on city council gave me status and name recognition I wouldn’t have as a private citizen.”

If status and name recognition matter to individuals, this framing clearly suggests elected office can be an instrument for achieving them.

With respect to elected office as an instrument for making change, we recognize that the kind of change people care about may vary considerably. Even the word “change” might be associated with “progressive,” which could be a trigger for conservative individuals to react negatively to the prompt. Consequently, we diffused the language of making “change” to the more benign language of making “a difference.”

What we are terming the social good frame reads as follows:

Several members of your local city council are retiring at the end of their current terms.

Studies show that candidates for open city council seats are successful more than 60 percent of the time.

People close to you have suggested you should run for one of the open seats.

One of the retiring city council members said, “I’m really glad I ran because I was able to use my seat on city council to make a bigger difference in the community than I would have been able to make as a private citizen.”

An additional measure is needed to capture the range of sentiments we found in our interviews. Take, for example, the views of Ellen, a Harvard law student:

I like doing things for my community and for my country, doing things for the people, affecting policy changes that I think make sense, but to me politics is kind of what gets in the way sometimes.

Ellen acknowledges that while politics *can* be an instrument for change, she does not feel it is a very good instrument. People have alternatives available to them if they are sincere about making change. What is needed is an assessment of how the individual ranks, or values, elected office as an instrument for making change relative to alternatives. We call this assessment *political primacy*. Those who rank elected office highly, regardless of which frame they are assigned in the experiment, should be more interested in running for office.

Our measure of political primacy is as follows:

What is the best way of contributing to your community? Please rank from 1 (best) to 3 (worst)

Being active in local government

Give money to good causes

Give time (volunteer) to good causes

While this is not an exhaustive list of alternatives, it provides a starting place for measuring political primacy that can be refined in future studies.

Data and Methods

On June 29, 2016, we administered the survey experiment on Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk (hereafter MTurk) platform. The title of the survey experiment to MTurk workers was “Short Survey on Opinions,” an intentionally vague title meant to attract as wide a pool of respondents as possible, not just those interested in politics. To that end, we paid for 600 respondents, which we obtained within two hours. Ten respondents did not answer any questions after providing consent, leaving us with 590 usable responses.

Table 1 provides an overview of the characteristics of our respondents. The experimental conditions were evenly distributed. There was diversity within the sample, in terms of age, race, gender, and income. The sample was generally well-educated, and leaned Democrat in terms of partisanship. 15.8 percent failed a manipulation check we added at the end of the survey instrument to see if respondents retained knowledge of their assigned condition.

Age	35.7 (11.7)	18-75
	N	Percent
Race		
White	457	79.8%
Hispanic	24	4.2
Black	46	8
Asian	40	7
Native American/Hawaiian	6	1
Male	305	52.4%
Income		
Under \$25,000	152	26.1%
\$25,000-50,000	181	31.1
\$50,000-75,000	136	23.4
\$75,000-100,000	67	11.5
\$100,000-150,000	31	5.3
Over \$150,000	15	2.6
Education		
Graduated 8 th grade	1	0.2%
Graduated high school	77	13.3
Some college	196	33.9
Graduated college	234	40.4
Graduated graduate school	71	12.3
Partisanship		
Strong Democrat	152	26.6%
Democrat	122	21.3
Lean Democrat	74	12.9
Independent	69	12.1
Lean Republican	28	4.9

Republican	76	13.3
Strong Republican	51	8.9
Condition		
Control frame	198	33.5%
Ambition frame	194	32.9
Social Good frame	198	33.6
Interest in running for open city council seat		
Not at all interested	150	25.6%
Not very interested	176	30
Somewhat interested	222	37.9
Very interested	38	6.5
Best way to contribute to community		
Be active in local government	166	29.4%
Give money to good causes	183	32.5
Volunteer for good causes	215	38.1
Civic skills		
Made a speech in last six months	181	31.8%
Chaired a meeting in last six months	132	23.4
Want to make a difference in the world and help people (Important & Very important)	438	75.3%
Ambition		
Want to earn a lot of money (Important & Very important)	333	57.1%
Want an important job (Important & Very important)	233	40
Efficacy		
Sometimes politics is too complicated to understand (Agree & Strongly agree)	189	32.4%
Public officials don't care what people like me think (Agree & Strongly agree)	331	56.8
Could do as good a job in public office (Agree & Strongly agree)	320	53.9
Problems care about can be solved through politics (Agree & Strongly agree)	194	32.4
Never pay attention to politics (Agree & Strongly agree)	62	10.6
Manipulation fail	93	15.8%

We ran ordered logistic regression models on our dependent measure (interest in running for one of the open seats on city council) using all 590 respondents, as well as analyses using only those who passed the manipulation check. Five separate models were used, each with increasing covariates. Model 1 included the experimental conditions, with the control condition as the comparison, to establish if the language in the frames affected how interested respondents were in running for one of the open seats. Model 2 added our measure of political primacy. Model 3 added a measure of civic skills (whether the respondent had given a speech in the last six months). Civic skills are an important predictor of political participation (Burns,

Schlozman, Brady 2001). Model 4 added all of our measures of political behavior, and Model 5 included demographic measures.

Results

The results of our survey experiment broadly confirm the understanding of elected office that we heard from our interview subjects—that when elected office is understood as an instrument for making a difference individuals are more interested in running. We find little evidence that individuals are interested in using elected office to achieve status and name recognition, which runs counter to the popular association of elected office with ambition.

Table 2 lists the results of our regression models on the full sample. The ambition frame significantly ($p < 0.05$) increases interest in running for office compared to the control frame in Model 1, but this effect loses significance as additional covariates are added in Models 2-5. The social good frame, on the other hand, has a significant effect on interest in running for office across all models.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Ambition frame	1.44* (0.27)	1.43 (0.27)	1.35 (0.26)	1.11 (0.23)	1.10 (0.23)
Social good frame	1.98*** (0.37)	1.84** (0.35)	1.86** (0.36)	1.66* (0.34)	1.78** (0.38)
Political primacy		3.49*** (0.63)	3.69*** (0.68)	2.83*** (0.55)	3.08*** (0.61)
Civic skills			1.60*** (0.16)	1.28* (0.14)	1.27* (0.15)
Ambition				1.21*** (0.06)	1.17** (0.07)
Feel politics is too complicated				1.29** (0.10)	1.29** (0.10)
Public officials don't care what I think				0.88 (0.07)	0.89 (0.07)
Feel could do as good a job as public officials				1.69*** (0.15)	1.62*** (0.14)
Politics is exciting				1.65*** (0.15)	1.60*** (0.14)
Politics solves problem I care about				1.26* (0.11)	1.23* (0.11)
Pay attention to politics				0.94 (0.09)	0.92 (0.09)
Want to make a difference in world					1.46*** (0.16)
Democrat					0.82 (0.15)
Male					1.39 (0.25)
Non White					0.75 (0.16)
Income					0.94 (0.06)
Education					0.96 (0.10)

Age					0.98 (0.01)
N	586	586	563	563	560
Standard errors in parentheses					
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001					

Political primacy stands out as having an especially strong relationship with interest in running for office. We find support, therefore, for our contention that individuals who feel that elected office is the best method for making a difference are more likely to be interested in running for office than those who feel alternative methods are better.

It is worth noting that our independent measure of ambition, modeled after that of Fox and Lawless (2005) has a significant ($p<0.01$) relationship with interest in running for office in both Models 4 and 5. Consequently, there is now some empirical basis for associating an individual's interest in making a lot of money with her interest in running for office. Having said that, the relationship between ambition and interest in running for office is comparable to (and less significant than) other, less heralded, predictors of interest, including wanting to make a difference in the world, feeling that politics can solve problems, and feeling that one could do as good a job as elected officials.

The relationship with ambition and interest in running for office is complicated when we restrict our analyses to only those who passed our manipulation check. Table 3 indicates that when demographic variables are introduced in Model 5, the relationship between ambition and interest loses significance. The same cannot be said for the other aforementioned predictors.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Ambition frame	1.52* (0.31)	1.47 (0.31)	1.41 (0.30)	1.22 (0.28)	1.24 (0.29)
Social good frame	2.25*** (0.46)	2.06*** (0.43)	2.03*** (0.43)	1.94** (0.44)	2.12** (0.49)
Political primacy		3.75*** (0.73)	3.96*** (0.79)	2.96*** (0.62)	3.18*** (0.68)
Civic skills			1.56*** (0.17)	1.21 (0.15)	1.27 (0.17)
Ambition				1.17*** (0.07)	1.12 (0.07)
Feel politics is too complicated				1.23* (0.10)	1.25* (0.11)
Public officials don't care what I think				0.88 (0.08)	0.90 (0.08)
Feel could do as good a job as public officials				1.88*** (0.18)	1.79*** (0.18)
Politics is exciting				1.58*** (0.15)	1.55*** (0.15)
Politics solves problem I care about				1.29** (0.13)	1.25* (0.13)
Pay attention to politics				0.98	0.97

Want to make a difference in world				(0.10)	(0.10)
					1.50***
Democrat					(0.18)
					0.91
Male					(0.18)
					1.44
Non White					(0.28)
					0.77
Income					(0.18)
					0.92
Education					(0.07)
					0.88
Age					(0.10)
					0.99
					(0.01)
N	497	497	480	480	478
Standard errors in parentheses					
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001					

Discussion

We opened this paper situating elected office in the context of the current Presidential election and wondered why anyone would subject themselves to such vitriol by running for office. The results of our research—both interviews and a survey experiment—suggest those who are tempted to run see elected office as an instrument for making a difference. Consequently, the question researchers on candidate emergence should ask is not why anyone would run for office, but rather what is it about elected office that anyone would want?

The implication of our research is that what individuals want to do with elected office is use it to make a difference, not as a means to increase their status and name recognition. This is a direct challenge to the literature on ambition and elected office, which has done little to define what ambition means and how it is related to elected office (Schlesinger 1966; Black 1972; Rohde 1979; Fowler & McClure 1989; Fox & Lawless 2005).

As mentioned, the relationship between ambition and elected office seems intuitive. After all, it must clearly take ambition to run for President of the United States. But can the same be said for school board, city council, or county commission? What is the relationship between ambition and individuals who run for these offices? Our research suggests such a relationship does not exist, or if it does it is not captured in things such as status and name recognition. Respondents are simply not interested in using elected office to gain these things.

Future research should specify the purpose of the individual's ambition. That is, an individual can be "ambitious" to make a difference. That's different from saying the individual *is* ambitious, which says nothing about what she is ambitious about, or why elected office should matter to her ambition.

Even if we conflate an individual's ambition with her desire to make a difference, this characteristic may not be as strong a predictor of interest in running for office as political primacy. We find evidence that ambition (defined here as the desire to make a lot of money), interest in making a difference, and political primacy each have independent relationships with an individual's interest in running for office. This makes sense. One can have a desire to make a difference, for example, without feeling that elected office is the best instrument for making a difference. The results of our experiment suggest this is indeed the case. It becomes much harder to say the same about political primacy. That is, it is difficult to imagine how an individual who feels elected office is the best instrument for making a difference is not interested in running for elected office. Consequently, identifying political primacy in individuals represents a much more powerful distinguishing characteristic of potential candidates than either ambition or the desire to make a difference.

Future research should further specify political primacy to understand at what levels of government it operates. It is conceivable that political primacy is enough to persuade an individual to run for city council, for example; it may not be enough to persuade the same individual to run for Congress.

Candidate emergence, as we have noted, exists on a long time horizon, and depends on many factors we cannot fully account for here. It may be that political primacy varies not just between individuals, as we have evidence for here, but within individuals, at different points in time, not unlike Fox and Lawless' (2011) argument regarding dynamic political ambition.

We should acknowledge limitations in our ability to generalize from this research. Our MTurk sample was not nationally representative. Those with internet access, and those with the time to serve as workers on MTurk had a greater likelihood of responding to the survey, and may differ in important, unobservable ways from the general population as it relates to interest in running for office. It remains to be seen if our results can be replicated in a nationally representative sample.

These limitations aside, the fact that the survey results corroborate our interviews suggests an instrumental view of elected office is appropriate, and that individuals who are considering a run for office are inclined to see it as an instrument for making change. Furthermore, political primacy offers the potential for a genuine distinguishing characteristic between likely candidates and un-likely candidates that has eluded candidate emergence scholars thus far.

References

- Adams, G.D., & Squire, P. (1997). Incumbent vulnerability and challenger emergence in Senate elections. *Political Behavior*, 19(2), 97-111.
- Basinger, S.J., & Ensley, M.J. (2007). Candidates, campaigns, or partisan conditions? Reevaluating strategic-politicians theory. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 32(3), 361-394.
- Bianco, W.T. (1984). Strategic decisions on candidacy in U.S. Congressional districts. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 9(2), 351-364.
- Black, G.S. (1972). A theory of political ambition: Career choices and the role of structural incentives. *American Political Science Review*, 66(1), 144-159.
- Brace, P. (1984). Progressive ambition in the House: A probabilistic approach. *Journal of Politics*, 46(2), 556-571.
- Brockman, D., Carnes, N., Crowder-Meyer, M., & Skovron, C. (2015). Who's a good candidate? How party gatekeepers evaluate potential nominees. Working paper presented at the Interdisciplinary Workshop on American Politics at the University of Michigan.
- Browning, R.P., & Jacob, H. (1964). Power motivation and the political personality. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 28(1), 75-90.
- Burns, N., Schlozman, K. L., & Verba, S. (2001). *The private roots of public action*. Harvard University Press.
- Cheng, C., & Tavits, M. (2011). Informal influences in selecting female political candidates. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(2), 460-471.
- DeHoog, R. H., Lowery, D., & Lyons, W. E. (1990). Citizen satisfaction with local governance: A test of individual, jurisdictional, and city-specific explanations. *The Journal of Politics*, 52(03), 807-837.
- Ehrenhalt, A. (1992). *The United States of ambition: Politicians, power, and the pursuit of office*. Random House.
- Engstrom, R.L. (1971). Political ambition and the prosecutorial office. *Journal of Politics*, 33(1), 190-194.
- Fishel, J. (1971). Ambition and the political vocation: Congressional challengers in American politics. *Journal of Politics*, 33(1), 25-56.

- Fleischmann, A., & Stein, L. (1998). Campaign contributions in local elections. *Political Research Quarterly*, 51(3), 673-689.
- Fowler, L.L., & McClure, R.D. (1989). *Political ambition: Who decides to run for Congress*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Fox, R.L., Lawless, J.L., & Feeley, C. (2001). Gender and the decision to run for office. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 26, 411-435.
- Fox, R.L., & Lawless, J.L. (2003). Family structure, sex-role socialization, and the decision to run for office. *Women & Politics*, 24(4), 19-48.
- Fox, R.L., & Lawless, J.L. (2004). Entering the arena? Gender and the decision to run for office. *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(2), 264-280.
- Fox, R.L., & Lawless, J.L. (2005). To run or not to run for office: Explaining nascent political ambition. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), 642-659.
- Fox, R.L., & Lawless, J.L. (2010). If only they'd ask: Gender, recruitment, and political ambition. *Journal of Politics*, 72(2), 310-336.
- Fox, R.L., & Lawless, J.L. (2011). Gains and losses in interest in running for office: The concept of dynamic political ambition. *Journal of Politics*, 73(2), 443-462.
- Fox, R. L., & Lawless, J. L. (2014). Uncovering the origins of the gender gap in political ambition. *American Political Science Review*, 108(03), 499-519.
- Fulton, S.A., Maestas, C.D., Maisel, L.S., & Stone, W.J. (2006). The sense of a woman: Gender, ambition, and the decision to run for Congress. *Political Research Quarterly*, 59(2), 235-248.
- Gaddie, R.K. (2004). *Born to run: Origins of the political career*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Goodman, J.S., Swanson, W.R., & Cornwell, E.E. (1970). Political recruitment in four selection systems. *Western Political Quarterly*, 23(1), 92-103.
- Hall, R.L., & van Houweling, R.P. (1995). Avarice and ambition in Congress: Representatives' decisions to run or retire from the U.S. House. *American Political Science Review*, 89(1), 121-136.
- Hedlund, R.D. (1973). Psychological predispositions: Political representatives and the public. *American Journal of Political Science*, 17(3), 489-505.

- Hibbing, J.R. (1986). Ambition in the House: Behavioral consequences of higher office goals among U.S. House representatives. *American Journal of Political Science*, 30(3), 651-665.
- Hunt, L., & Pendley, R.E. (1972). Community gatekeepers: An examination of political recruiters. *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 16(3), 411-438.
- Jacob, H. (1962). Initial recruitment of elected officials in the U.S.—A model. *Journal of Politics*, 24(4), 703-716.
- Jacobson, G., & Kernell, S. (1981). *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections and Voting*.
- Kazee, T.A., & Thornberry, M.C. (1990). Where's the party? Congressional candidate recruitment and American party organizations. *Western Political Quarterly*, 43(1), 61-80.
- Lassen, D.D., & Serritzlew, S. (2011). Jurisdiction size and local democracy: Evidence on internal political efficacy from large-scale municipal reform. *American Political Science Review*, 105(2), 238-258.
- Lawless, J.L. (2012) *Becoming A Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawless, J.L., & Fox, R.L. (2005) *It Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawless, J.L., & Fox, R.L. (2010) *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawless, J.L., & Fox, R.L. (2015). *Running From Office: Why Young Americans are Turned Off to Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Levine, M.D., & Hyde, M.S. (1977). Incumbency and the theory of political ambition: A rational-choice model. *Journal of Politics*, 39(4), 959-983.
- Loomis, B. (1988). *The new American politician: Ambition, entrepreneurship, and the changing face of political life*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Maestas, C.D., Maisel, L.S., & Stone, W.J. (2005). National party efforts to recruit state legislators to run for the U.S. House. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 30(2), 277-300.
- Maestas, C.D., Fulton, S., Maisel, L.S., & Stone, W.J. (2006). When to risk it? Institutions, ambitions, and the decision to run for the U.S. House. *American Political Science Review*, 100(2), 195-208.

- Maisel, L.S., & Stone, W.J. (1997). Determinants of candidate emergence in U.S. House elections: An exploratory study. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 22(1), 79-96.
- McConaughy, J.B. (1950). Certain personality factors of state legislators in South Carolina. *American Political Science Review*, 44(4), 897-903.
- Mezey, M.L. (1970). Ambition theory and the office of Congressmen. *Journal of Politics*, 32(3), 563-579.
- Prewitt, K., & Nowlin, W. (1969). Political ambition and the behavior of incumbent politicians. *Western Political Quarterly*, 22(2), 298-308.
- Rohde, D.W. (1979). Risk-bearing and progressive ambition: The case of members of the United States House of Representatives. *American Journal of Political Science*, 23(1), 1-26.
- Sabonmatsu, K. (2002). Political parties and the recruitment of women to state legislatures. *Journal of Politics*, 64(3), 791-809.
- Schlesinger, J.A. (1966). *Ambition and politics Political careers in the United States*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company.
- Schwartz, D.C. (1969). Toward a theory of political recruitment. *Western Political Quarterly*, 22(3), 552-571.
- Seligman, L.G. (1961). Political recruitment and party structure: A case study. *American Political Science Review*, 55(1), 77-86.
- Shames, S. (2017). *Out of the Running: Why Millennials Reject Political Careers and Why It Matters*. New York: NYU Press.
- Stone, W. J., & Maisel, L. S. (2003). The Not-So-Simple Calculus of Winning: Potential US House Candidates' Nomination and General Election Prospects. *Journal of Politics*, 65(4), 951-977.
- Swinerton, E.N. (1968). Ambition and American state executives. *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 12(4), 538-549.
- Tobin, R.J., & Keynes, E. (1975). Institutional differences in the recruitment process: A four-state study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 19(4), 667-682.