

TO EMERGE? BREADWINNING, MOTHERHOOD, AND WOMEN'S DECISIONS TO RUN FOR OFFICE

ABSTRACT: Women's under-representation in American politics is often attributed to their low levels of political ambition. Yet scholarship has not addressed a major leak in the pipeline to power: that many qualified and politically ambitious women who do want to run decide against candidacy. Focusing on this group, we theorize that at the final stage of candidate emergence, household income, breadwinning responsibilities, and family composition are crucial obstacles to women's candidacies. We examine these dynamics through an original survey of women most likely to run for office: alumnae of the largest campaign training organization in the United States (n=702). Although we do not find income effects, we provide evidence that breadwinning—responsibility for a large share of household income—*negatively* affects women's expressive ambition, especially for mothers. These findings have important implications for understanding how the political economy of the household affects candidate emergence and descriptive representation in the United States.

The decision to seek political office is highly personal, but it has important consequences for public life. As was clear with the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the breaking of political barriers by individual candidates is a powerful symbol. So too is loss. In the wake of Hillary Clinton’s failure to transcend the “highest, hardest glass ceiling,” the proportion of women running for Congress rose a remarkable 150 percent, and from 2016 to 2018, state legislative races saw a 40 percent increase in women fielded as major party candidates (CAWP 2019). The huge increase in the number of women putting themselves forward for political office since 2016 seems like a positive development for U.S. democracy. Yet despite greater numbers of women running (and winning), some groups of women are still underrepresented in American political life, including younger women, mothers, and the largest growing demographic in the U.S., single mothers (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013, Gibson 2019). The absence of these women is not only a symbolic problem; it also decreases descriptive representation on other dimensions like race and class (Barnes and Holman, 2018, 2019), and reduces public trust in government (Clayton, O’Brien, and Piscopo 2019).

While an earlier generation of scholarship found that women’s responsibilities at home shaped the contours of their public lives (e.g., Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994, 974), more recent literature has converged on women’s lack of political ambition as the key driver of women’s underrepresentation (King and Thomsen 2019), at least in the United States (Piscopo 2019).¹ Key texts on women’s ambition finds that household composition, including marital status and motherhood, does not alter women’s nascent political ambition in a meaningful way (Fox and Lawless 2014b, 399,

¹ Explanations for women’s low ambition include women’s lack of political ambition to socialization (see Fox and Lawless 2004; Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010), and to women’s perceptions of their low odds of success in competitive or hostile political environments (Barber, Butler, and Preece 2016; Kanthak and Woon 2015; Schneider et al. 2015; Maestas et al. 2006; Fulton et al. 2006, but c.f. Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece 2017 for an exception).

Lawless 2014).² Yet, if family dynamics do not influence women’s nascent political ambition, why are young women, mothers, and single mothers so much less likely to hold political positions in the US? In this paper we revive the debate about family lives and political ambition, arguing that for even for the most politically engaged and ambitious women, motherhood and income-earning responsibilities may put political bids out of reach,

In advancing this claim we make three important contributions to our understanding of political ambition: one theoretical, one methodological, and one empirical. First, we de-couple theories of political ambition for women, arguing that the factors that contribute to “nascent political ambition”—a professed desire to hold political office—may be different than those that contribute to “expressive political ambition”—the actual decision to compete in an election (for definitions, see Fox and Lawless 2005, 644). Individual-level nascent ambition alone does not determine who runs; it must be understood against a background of structural barriers to entry that vary by household.

Specifically, we theorize that three factors—two resource-related, and one related to family structure—may affect ambitious women’s decisions to emerge as candidates. Household income might influence the decision to run for office if, like “normal goods” in economics, people from wealthier backgrounds face lower barriers to political candidacy (Carnes 2012, 2016, Carnes and Lupu 2016, 841). We would observe an *income effect* for women if higher household income allows wealthier women to invest more time in political service than women from poorer households. In addition, we hypothesize that total household income may not be the only deciding factor: the distribution of income earning responsibility might also produce a *breadwinner constraint*.

² C.f. Crowder-Meyer 2018. To be sure, early scholarship focused on structural factors, e.g. Rule 1981; Sapiro 1982. But recent scholarship has focused on institutional (Palmer and Simon 2012) and perceptual concerns (e.g., Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018) rather than material conditions.

Responsibility for the lion's share of a household's income, regardless of the level of income, may prohibit many women from running. Finally, we expect income and breadwinning to interact with family structure: women who do not have the support of other earners, and those who have more dependents to support, may be least likely of all to run. Together, we suggest that household earnings, breadwinning responsibilities, and the composition of the family may impinge on women's expressive political ambition.³

A second departure from previous scholarship addresses a persistent data challenge for studies of candidate emergence: how to identify the correct "pool" of candidates to study. Prominent work has focused on political elites—such as graduate students at elite universities (Shames 2019), or people in high-powered legal or business careers (Lawless & Fox, 2005, 2010)—arguing that they are the most likely groups to run for office. Yet since the vast majority of elites will never consider holding office, these studies cannot determine which people are actually in the *likely* candidate pool, and do not have the statistical power to unpack the influence of various factors on candidate emergence. Clearly, too, a study of people who have already filed for candidacy will not provide insight into the factors that drive selection into or out of politics.⁴ Even King and Thomsen's (2019) cutting-edge research, which examines three novel potential candidate pools—

³ Historically, women in US politics have been less likely to be married with children than male politicians (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013, table 2.5); for discussion, see also Crowder-Meyer 2018; Holman and Schneider 2016; Kanthak and Krause 2010; Hughes 2011; Preece and Stoddard 2015, 2011.

⁴ One exception is an innovative field experiment by Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece (2017) which stimulates women's participation in Republican caucuses through an encouragement design. However, the baseline level of nascent ambition of the women who participated in these events is unclear.

sitting state legislators, lawyers that donated to political campaigns, and people named as potential candidates in newspaper—yields few conversions to candidacy.⁵ In sum, systematically identifying plausible candidates who have not yet made the decision to run is very difficult.

We overcome this data challenge through an original national survey of women who offer the best bet of emerging as candidates: alumnae of the selective, and intensive, Democratic women’s campaign training program, Emerge America.⁶ Women’s campaign training programs are now a common feature of politics both in the United States and abroad, but Emerge stands out for its size and national spread.⁷ Our study combines an original survey from 2016—in which 702 of the then-2083 alumnae (37 percent) participated—with other novel sources of information, including two years of participant-observation in training sessions, interviews with approximately 70 participants and staff, and five years of intake and selection process records. Since 50 percent of Emerge alumnae do run for office, and women who went through the program constituted 9 percent of the 3,418 women who ran for any state legislative office in 2018, we believe this sample offers us the

⁵ In King and Thomsen (2019)’s study, only 1.5 percent of all state legislators entered congressional races, and 6 percent of lawyers who had also donated to campaigns did so. Their largest run rates were from individuals named as likely candidates by newspapers, wherein 49 percent of women and 56 percent of men emerged. This latter group (of 1,646 people, including 432 women) provides the closest comparison to the Emerge alumnae. Yet to our knowledge King and Thomsen (2019)’s data does not possess individual or household characteristics for potential candidates.

⁶ As the vast majority of women in U.S. politics are Democrats, Emerge women are the most likely to run in the party most likely to have women run, and represent a substantial fraction of all U.S. women running. (<https://emergeamerica.org/first-time-women-candidates-poised-to-shake-up-state-legislatures/>).

⁷ See Kreitzer and Osborne 2018 and Piscopo 2018.

clearest insights into the factors that help women convert nascent political ambition into political candidacies.^{8,9}

We find that the intra-household allocation of financial responsibilities is a critical and under-appreciated part of the conversion of nascent ambition into political candidacy. Two key findings stand out. First, we present new qualitative and quantitative evidence consistent with a “breadwinner” constraint: breadwinners were between 13 and 16 percentage points less likely to run for office than women who contributed less than 25 percent of household income. To put the breadwinner effect into perspective, our most conservative estimate is more than double the size of the long-touted 6-point gender gap in expressive ambition identified by Lawless and Fox (2004, 2014a). Second, breadwinner effects operate differently for women depending on family configuration. Mothers who were partnered (cohabitating or married) and not earning an income—“stay-at-home moms”—had the highest rates of candidacy (60% ran), while partnered breadwinners with children, and unpartnered women, were the least likely to throw their hats into the ring (38% and 32%, respectively). These findings help explain why many of the best bets—the women most likely to run for office—fail to come forward, and why single mothers, who are four times as likely as partnered mothers to be sole earners in their households, are rarely found in Congress (see Appendix L).

The second half of the paper considers the internal validity and generalizability of these findings. We examine whether Emerge selected breadwinners that were disadvantaged on other

⁸ This number is Emerge’s estimate; it is close to what our survey obtains. Alumnae who ran were as likely to answer our survey as those who did not. See Appendix J.

⁹ New research on Republican women’s candidacies includes Karpowitz et al. 2017, Gimenez et al. 2019, and the essays in Och and Shames (2018).

dimensions relative to women without earning responsibilities; whether the cost of running campaigns confounds our analysis; and whether the same constraints would likely operate for Republican women and for men. Finally, we probe the reason that income does not constrain expressive ambition in the Emerge sample. Analyzing records from Emerge California's applicant pool, we find that the program is already inadvertently selecting on income during the admissions process. We therefore interpret the null effects for income as informative in a different way: as Carnes has found for the working class, for women with political aspirations, low income may constitute a key barrier to consideration as a serious candidate (Carnes 2012, 2015, 2016; Box-Steffensmeier 1996). We conclude by considering the policy implications and potential interventions that might increase the representation of less privileged women in public life.

Political Ambition and Candidate Emergence

The concept of political ambition has a long scholarly pedigree. Starting in the mid-1960s, researchers began to theorize political ambition as it related to opportunities to become politically engaged.¹⁰ In early scholarship, ambition was not "free floating" (Schlesinger 1966), but highly situational, responding to immediate forces in the political environment and based on rational decision-making after factoring in the costs and benefits of holding office, and the likelihood of winning (Black 1972, 145). The next wave of scholarship formalized models of ambition and began identifying its levels, effects, constraints, and exceptions.¹¹ This work maintained a strong focus on

¹⁰ Prewitt & Nolan, 1969; Mezey, 1970; Browning & Jacob, 1964; and Swinerton, 1968.

¹¹ Hunt and Pendley, 1972; Levine and Hyde, 1977; Rohde 1979; Brace 1984; Fowler and McClure 1989; Kazee 1994; Hall and van Houweling 1995; Box-Steffensmeier 1996; Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2000; notably, see also Fenno (1978) and Mayhew (1974), on reelection desire.

the effects of context, especially the structural and institutional realities that shaped electoral probabilities, on individual political ambition, but also tempered this “opportunity structure” view with an understanding that aspirational goals could simultaneously produce (or inflame) political ambition.¹²

The archetypical candidate in the first ambition studies was undoubtedly male, but in the early 1980s, gender scholars turned to ambition as a potential cause of women’s underrepresentation (Rule 1981). As Sapiro (1982) noted, because the gendered division of labor in households put different social demands on women’s time, the structures and constraints of candidacy differed for women.¹³ An early-1990s surge of women candidates in the U.S., especially the press-dubbed “year of the woman” in 1992, galvanized the women and politics subfield.¹⁴ Threaded through that early body of work was a debate about whether resource constraints—women’s greater family and household responsibilities and relatively lower levels of salary, income, and wealth—still constituted a key barrier to women’s candidacies. Alternative theories suggested that ambition was primarily a characteristic of personality,¹⁵ or based on gendered motivations, fears, and perceptions of politics.¹⁶ Both these alternatives suggested the problem might be amenable to

¹² E.g. “good public policy” (Fenno’s 1978) or “political will” to win (Fowler and McClure’s 1989).

¹³ On the gendered division of household labor and its effect on women’s ambition for leadership roles, see Blau and Ferber 1985; Williams 2000; Fels 2004; Hewlett 2007; Crittenden 2002.

¹⁴ On women as candidates and legislators, see: Duke 1993; Carroll 1994; Thomas 1994; on the “Year of the Woman,” see Cook et al 1993.

¹⁵ See Gaddie (2003); Lawless and Fox (2010, 2005) directly link political ambition to confidence, or over-confidence, in the case of men.

¹⁶ Schneider et al. 2015; Kanthak and Woon 2015; Maestas et al. 2006; Maisel et al. 2006; Fulton et al. 2006; Holman and Schneider 2016.

intervention via encouragement, including through candidate training programs; such programs proliferated as a result.¹⁷

In recent years, the dominant narrative in studies of gender and ambition has been that the household doesn't matter. As Fox and Lawless state, "traditional family dynamics do not account for the gender gap in political ambition. Neither marital and parental status, nor the division of labor pertaining to household tasks and child care, predicts potential candidates' [nascent] political ambition" (2014b, 399; brackets ours). If true, it is then difficult to explain why women who hold political posts are much less likely to have children and be married than men (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013: table 2.5). Indeed, work that examined political economy factors, including pathbreaking work on gender and participation (e.g., Burns et al. 1997), the representation of the working class (e.g., Carnes 2012, 2016), and household bargaining and voting (e.g., Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006), suggests a deep relationship between household resources and political participation of all kinds.

While we cannot hope to settle such an extensive debate, this paper intervenes in the conversation by precisely specifying the scope conditions under which household dynamics should matter, and tests these ideas using novel data from a theoretically relevant sample. Linking expressive political ambition (i.e. candidate emergence) to nascent ambition requires that scholars overcome a formidable challenge. Studying people who have already decided to run for office is too late in the pipeline, preventing generalization to non-runners. Yet, systematically identifying plausible candidates who have not yet made the decision to run is very hard. Studies of the general population

¹⁷ Organizations that train women to run topnotch campaigns have proliferated (Piscopo 2018, Kreitzer and Osborne 2018) so have political action committees to raise money for women's campaigns (Cooperman and Crowder-Meyer 2018). See too Kalla and Porter (2020).

must be very large because very few individuals will ever run. Prior work has therefore analyzed either elected officials (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Fulton et al 2006; Fowler and McClure 1989), or groups far upstream in the pipeline of potential candidates, including mid-career professionals in key political feeder careers like law, business, education and activism (Fox and Lawless 2004; Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010), and students in prestigious educational programs that have produced many politicians (Shames 2017). Such studies have taught us a tremendous amount, but cannot provide leverage on the decision-making process at the moment when women decide whether to convert their nascent ambitions into candidacy. To our knowledge, only Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece (2017) have directly addressed this issue. Their field experiments during Republican caucuses show that encouragement matters for women’s willingness to volunteer for party positions.

In this paper, we examine women who have sought candidate training (exhibiting nascent ambition), but who have not yet sought office. Our focus is on understanding whether resource constraints shape women’s emergence as candidates. Because household work is still deeply uneven between the sexes, we would expect women, especially those facing competing work and family demands, to be less likely to emerge.¹⁸ In addition, many public positions are unpaid or are poorly paid. Only at higher levels of office do they tend to come with a regular salary, meaning that the financial opportunity costs of politics can be quite high indeed.

Building on previous research we propose two theoretical mechanisms—not mutually exclusive—that link structural and resource factors to women’s decision to emerge: an income constraint and a breadwinning constraint. We theorize that an *income* constraint means that women who are more resource-constrained, in absolute terms, will be less likely to run for office, while

¹⁸ Williams 2000; Thomas 2002; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Hewlett 2007; Iverson and Rosenbluth 2010; Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018; Burns, Schlozman, Verba 2001.

women who are from richer households will be able to invest time in political service. Alternatively, the absolute size of one's household income might have less of an impact than who produces it; we thus also investigate whether a *breadwinner* constraint exists for women who earn the lion's share of their household's income. Finally, we expect that these effects will also depend on household composition. Women who are not partnered with a second income-earner, or who have additional financial dependents like children, may rationally need to focus their time and energy on "breadwinning" rather than extracurricular pursuits. Our survey, which covered household income and respondents' contributions to that income, as well as household composition, allows us to directly examine these theorized channels of candidate emergence and their potential interactions.

Data and Methods

Emerge America, first established as EmERGE California in 2002, is a widely-known national organization that trains Democratic women to run for office. With chapters now in 25 states, and 813 candidates standing for office in 2018 alone, it is the largest, most comprehensive, and most visible program of its kind (Emerge America 2018). Aimed at "building the farm team" for the Democratic Party by getting high-quality female candidates into state and local offices, EmERGE provides comprehensive training across multiple domains, including public speaking, fundraising, field operations, messaging, and ethics. Though the exact schedule varies across the state chapters, each state's program requires at least 70 hours of trainings led by national and local political consultants and experts—far more than any other candidate training program.

Emerge America is an important study site not just for its size and comprehensiveness, but because of the theoretical relevance of its population. Most women in politics in the U.S. are Democrats, and the vast majority run for state and local office. Studying EmERGE attendees, who are ambitious Democratic women close to making their final decision about whether to run, provides much-needed insight into the political economy of women's representation. Anyone already facing

severe obstacles, like poverty and heavy care responsibilities, is unlikely to participate in 70 hours of training far from home. Moreover, Emerge offers more comprehensive trainings, networking, and political resources than any of its competitors, reducing the possibility that its graduates will select out of politics for any of these reasons. Yet even here, in a “most likely” case, 50 percent of the program’s alumnae do not run. What explains this variation?

In collaboration with the national office of Emerge America, we began our study of the decision to run among Emerge alumnae through participant observation of training sessions in the California chapter (the largest and oldest state affiliate) from 2015 to 2016. To this we added formal interviews of three leading national office staff members and eight state-level executive directors. From these conversations we compiled a set of survey questions and three sources of data to learn about the women who pass through Emerge. Finally, we gathered data on all applicants and participants in the Emerge California program from 2008-2012. The data for this paper thus includes:

- 1) **Intake data:** the initial demographic characteristics of all Emerge America’s graduates, which we use to assess the representativeness of respondents to the alumnae survey;
- 2) **Screening data:** records of screening interviews for more than 200 applicants to Emerge California from 2008-2012, which we use to understand the mechanism of selection into the program;¹⁹
- 3) **Applicant data:** for applicants who did not participate in Emerge California’s 2008-2012 programs, we collected data on whether they eventually ran for office, which we use to evaluate program efficacy;
- 4) Our **alumnae survey:** an original survey of Emerge America alumnae who completed the program from 2003-2016.

¹⁹ An example interview assessment is shown in Appendix A.

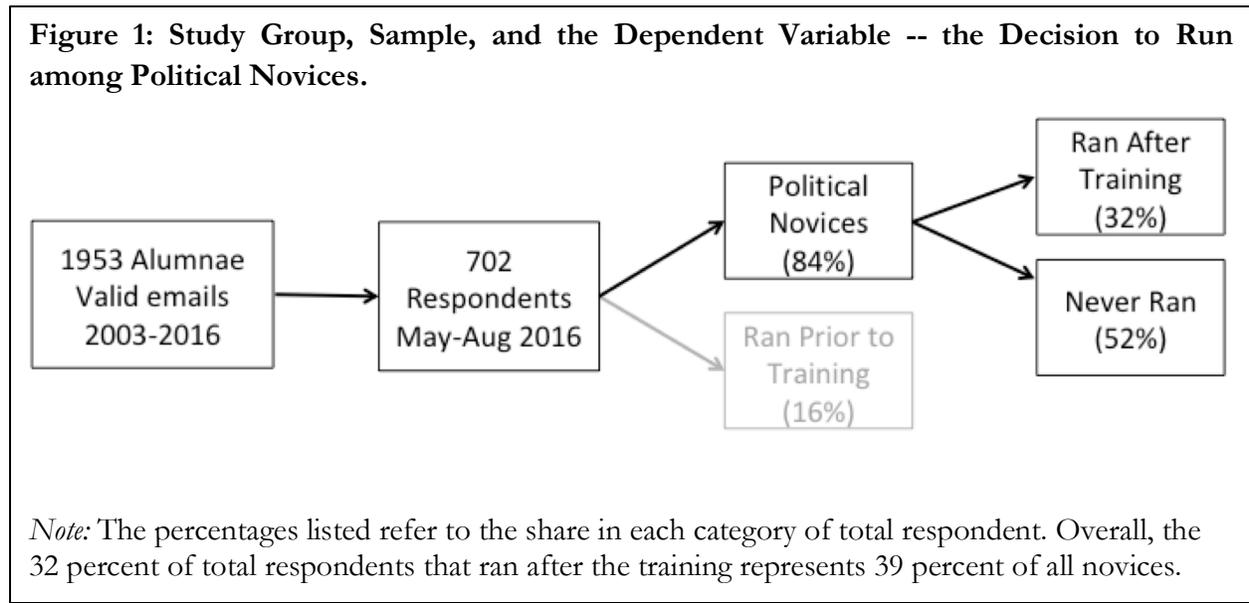
Sampling Frame and Survey Recruitment: From 2003 to 2016, across all state branches, Emerge ushered 2083 women through its program. This roster produced a list of 1953 alumnae with valid email address. Using this email database and Qualtrics, we recruited Emerge alumnae from all 16 state affiliates that existed in 2015 to participate in our survey from May to August 2016. In total, 702 women answered the survey.²⁰ The survey received a final response rate of 37 percent if considering only those with valid contact information, or 35 percent if including all known alumnae.²¹

Representativeness of Survey Respondents: We use measures from Emerge’s national intake data to compare the difference of means for all available social, economic, and demographic information between alumnae who took the survey with those who did not in order to assess the representativeness of our respondent sample (full results available in Appendix J). Respondents match the Emerge alumnae population on the measurable dimensions of age, sexual orientation, and having children. White alumnae were slightly more likely to be among respondents (65 percent versus 61 percent of alumnae, meaning about 28 more white women responded than should have), and more recent alumnae were slightly more likely to take the survey. Geographically, the sample is nationally diverse, with bigger populations in states that have larger numbers of graduates. Although

²⁰ Alumnae who had not taken or finished the survey were re-contacted via email after three weeks, six weeks, 11 weeks, and 12 weeks. In the final week of the survey (week 13), alumnae were also contacted by phone by Emerge state executive directors and staff to ask for their participation.

²¹ Most online surveys of political elites in recent years have lower response rates than this: for instance, Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth (2018, 529) obtain 8.6-8.7% in their two surveys, and Hertel-Fernandez et al. 2019 received a 10 percent response rate from congressional legislative staff. Requests for face-to-face interviews typically have much higher response rates.

there is a slight over-representation of white women’s (the largest group of Emerge’s attendees) experiences within our findings, on other dimensions our sample is fairly representative of Emerge’s alumnae.



Survey Design and Analysis: Our fifteen-minute survey was designed to gather data related to several theoretical branches of the women’s emergence literature including 1.) resource and demographic factors, such as income, race, and geographic location; 2.) perceptions of and responsiveness to political and institutional constraints, such as local party and other support and open seats, and 3.) motivations toward and fears about running for office, including concerns about loss of privacy, facing discrimination from voters, and a like or dislike of competition.²²

Dependent Variable: Our primary dependent variable is the decision to run among political novices—those who had not run for office prior to participating in Emerge. In practice,

²² Full survey instrument available upon request. Appendix B lists the key variables.

respondents fall into three categories: (1) those graduates who had run for office prior to attending the training (16 percent of respondents), (2) those who ran for office after the training (32 percent), and (3) those who had never run (52 percent). These percentages are based on the 665 respondents who answered the question about having run before (see Figure 1). Although we focus on novices, all results hold or strengthen when those who ran prior to training are included (Appendix D).

Why Not Run for Office? Evidence from Open-Ended Answers

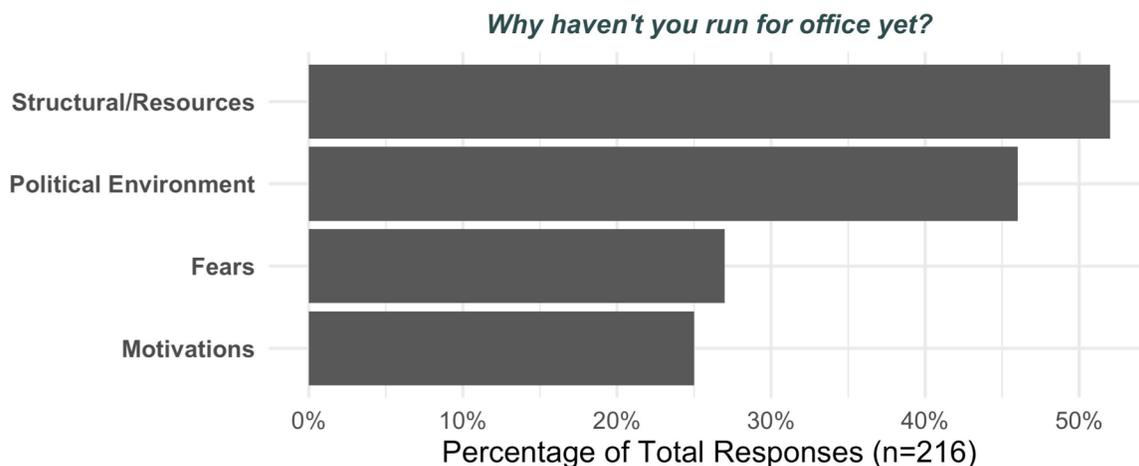
As a first pass at understanding the decision to emerge as political candidates we analyzed open-ended responses to the following survey question, shown only to those who indicated they had not yet run for office at the time of the survey: *“There are a lot of important reasons why people decide not to run for political office or find they are no longer able to. Why haven’t you run for office yet?”*

In reading the responses, we were struck by the prominence of the discussion of work-life balance issues, especially those related to time and money. Relying on broad distinctions drawn within the literature on political ambition, we coded four types of response: those focused on *structural factors and resources* (marriage; personal financial situation or time commitments, such as mentions of salary, commute, time with children, etc.); those on the *local political environment* (such as mentions of an entrenched incumbent or living in a red versus blue district); those with *fears or negative perceptions of the electoral process* (such as being afraid of racial discrimination or not wanting one’s family’s privacy to be invaded); and *lack of intrinsic motivation* (such as lacking the desire to serve). Table 1 presents examples of answers counted within each category.

Table 1. Qualitative Data Coded from Open-Ended Answers

CODING	EXAMPLE
Structural Factors and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Financial obligations (student loans, in particular).” • “I don't have the time and energy that it will take to do the job well. I am too busy with my job and parenting. I learned that campaigning is a full time job...” • “I was caring for an ill parent and I wanted my son to graduate from high school first.”
Local Political Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I live in a very conservative, Republican area and I'm LGBT so it would be almost impossible to win.” • “Incumbent very well liked.” • “Not the right opening.”
Fears/Negative Perceptions of Electoral Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I don't like the exposure and ugliness of campaigns.” • “I value my privacy too much.” • “Afraid of the personal scrutiny, dislike fundraising and not good at answering questions on the fly.”
Lack of Intrinsic Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I have other gifts to share as an educayor [sic]” • “I don't have the desire to serve in public office.” • “I'm demoralized by politics in general, and the Democratic party in specific. I would run for local office in a nonpartisan race...” (note: this would be coded “Political Environment” also.)

Figure 2: Deterrent Factors in Candidate Emergence.



Note: Open-ended coding applies to respondents who had not run for office. Percentage gives the number of responses fitting into that category out of the total number of responses. The long form responses could count for multiple categories, so the total of all the bars exceeds 100 percent.

Figure 2 displays the prevalence of answers to the question “Why haven’t you run for office yet” in each category.²³ As the figure shows, the most commonly cited reasons for not running were structural and resource constraints; just over half (52 percent) of non-runners cited these factors as their primary concern. In addition, and consistent with arguments that link political opportunity structure to expressive ambition, 46 percent who had not run cited the political and institutional environment.²⁴ About another quarter cited concerns or fears about the act of running²⁵ or a lack of

²³ Responses could count in more than one category; totals thus do not sum to 100. Appendix C constrains the coding so each response could only fit into one category; the results are similar.

²⁴ Consistent with Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Dittmar 2015; Sanbonmatsu 2002.

²⁵ Consistent with Schneider et al. 2016; Kanthak and Woon 2015.

motivation to seek or hold office.²⁶ Thus explanations in previous literature all appear, but the structural explanations absent in recent research were the most common.

In sum, when questioned in an open-ended manner, ambitious women implicate structural and resource constraints in their decisions not to run. However, it is possible that women list these constraints for reasons of social desirability—for instance, it may “sound better” to say that one needs to stay employed to pay the bills than to say that one is fearful or unmotivated. In the next section, we therefore investigate whether we can predict which women run for office using measures unlikely to be sensitive to such demand effects, including quantitative measures of household income, contributions to the family budget, and household composition.

Out of the Running? Evidence from Quantitative Measures

To reiterate ideas expressed above, which were reinforced by our qualitative data, arguments about the impact of structural and resource characteristics on women’s position in the economy and public sphere suggest that because home and child work remains uneven between the sexes, women facing competing work and family demands will be less represented in politics.²⁷ We theorize two mechanisms that link structural factors to the conversion of nascent ambition into expressive ambition:

(H1) an *income constraint* means that women who are more resource-constrained will be less likely to run for office than wealthier women.

(H2) a *breadwinner constraint* suggests that women who are responsible for the lion’s share of household income will be less likely to run.

²⁶ Consistent with Schneider et al. 2016; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013.

²⁷ Hochschild and Machung 2012; Iverson and Rosenbluth 2010; Hewlett 2007; Crittenden 2002; Thomas 2002; Burns et al 2001.

We further conjecture that household dynamics will interact with income and breadwinning constraints. Women who do not contribute much to their household income (non-breadwinners) may be able to contribute to public life by seeking office, which we expect is most common when they have a partner that can contribute income. Women without children may also be similarly unconstrained, but their higher likelihood of being unpartnered may attenuate their expressive ambition. Finally, we expect single mothers, who have especially intensive breadwinning responsibilities, should be least likely of all to emerge as candidates.

(H3) a *composition* interaction effect suggests that women who are not partnered will be least likely to run, and that breadwinning responsibilities will be particularly prohibitive for women with children.

We assess the evidence for these hypotheses using multiple quantitative measures from our survey. The benefit of this data is that it allows us to sidestep some of the challenges inherent to using qualitative data. We begin by assessing whether our objective measures of household income and contribution to that household income predict candidate emergence.

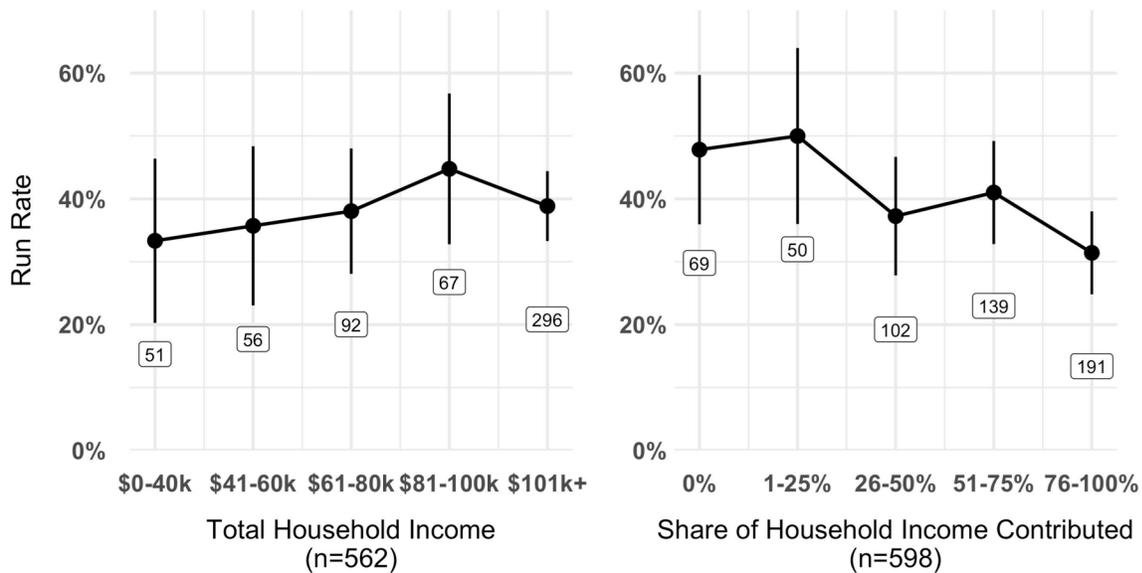
Results: We present results in two ways. First, Figure 3 presents raw run rates for women with different levels of household income (left side) and breadwinning responsibilities (right side). Second, Figure 4 presents results from OLS regressions predicting the probability that alumnae in our sample ran for office using breadwinning (left) and total household income (right) (see Appendix E for logit coefficients). The first row in each coefficient plot shows the estimated coefficient from a bivariate correlation between the variable demarcated in a given column (total household income or the share of income contributed to the household) and the run rate of alumnae.

Successive rows in each figure add various other control variables to the regressions. The row with “Emerge Fixed Effects” adds controls for state and year of graduation. “Demographics” adds controls for ethnicity, education, area of residence, and LGBT identification. “Political Environment” adds controls for pre-treatment (nascent) level of ambition and involvement with the Democratic party. “Psychological Fears” adds a control for the respondent’s average response on a battery questions addressing psychological fears, and “Family Structure” adds controls for whether the candidate is unpartnered and whether she has any children.²⁸

Is there an income constraint? In the most basic analysis, using simple bivariate regressions, we see no relationship between income and candidate emergence, counter to the income effect hypothesis. The left panel of Figure 3, below, depicts bands of income from \$0-\$40,000 in \$20,000 increments, up to the final category of \$101,000 or more. Though there is a slight rise in propensity to run across the distribution of household income, it does not reach statistical significance. We probe the lack of an income constraint in depth in the discussion section below.

²⁸ Appendix G, which presents independent multivariate regression estimates rather than the additive multivariate regression estimates depicted in Figure 4, shows that breadwinning remains substantively and statistically significant with any group of controls except for those included in Family Structure (being unpartnered, and being a mother).

Figure 3: Run Rates Among Prior Political Novices: Income is Uncorrelated with Emergence (left panel), but Breadwinners are Less Likely to Run (right panel).



Note: The average expected rate of running within the income and breadwinning categories on the x-axes are reported with 95% confidence intervals calculated via OLS. The number of respondents in each category is reported in the bubble below each category. The sample sizes reflect the focus on novices (those who had not run prior to the training). They differ across the panels because X. Appendix D illustrates the breadwinner plot with all respondents, which shows that the results hold (and strengthen) when all graduates are included.

Is there a breadwinner constraint? In the right-hand chart of Figure 3 we show the run rate within five categories of household income contribution: those who contributed nothing to their household income, those who contributed up to 25 percent, 26-50 percent, 51-75 percent, and those who contributed 75 percent or more to their household's income. Figure 3 reveals that graduates have substantial differences in their propensity to run after the program across the breadwinning spectrum.

Recall that 39% of all political novices ran for office after the Emerge training program (see Figure 1). We find that that non-breadwinners are the exception. Indeed, there is a 13 percentage-point difference in run rates as we move from women who contribute less than 25 percent of the

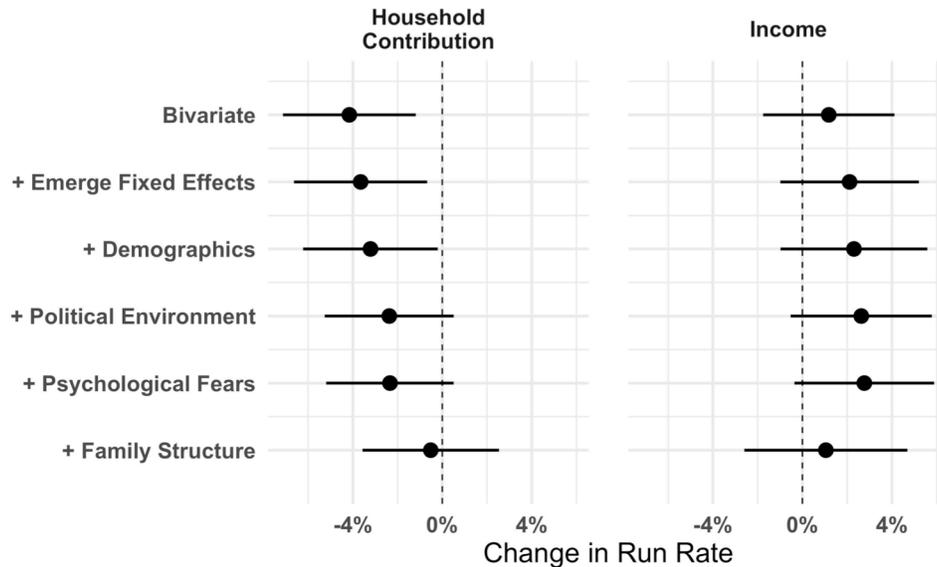
household's income (around 50 percent ran) to women who contribute more than 25 percent (37 percent ran). Thereafter, the relationship continues to slope downward, though less dramatically. For novices, a t-test for the difference between women who contributed 0-50% of household income and women who contributed 51-100% is statistically distinguishable from zero (two-tailed p -value=0.061) with a difference in run rate of -7.98 percentage points. A linear OLS regression using all household income categories is also distinguishable from zero ($B=-4.15$, $p=0.006$); each categorical jump on the distribution of breadwinning decreases the probability that Emerge alumnae ran for office by about 4 percentage points.²⁹ This finding is consistent with a breadwinner constraint: as the proportion of income that women contributed to the household increases, the likelihood of running for office decreases.

Figure 4 further investigates the relationships between income, breadwinning, and the decision to run by adding control variables in OLS analyses. The coefficient plot on the left shows the marginal effect and 95% confidence intervals for percentage contribution to household income, for each model specified. The plot on the right shows the same but for total household income. Each coefficient plot should be read from top to bottom, as each successive model includes all the variables specified in the previous model.³⁰

²⁹ This finding is not an artifact of clustering in the population included in the study. The labels denoting bin size indicate that graduates are distributed across the breadwinning spectrum—graduates that contributed nothing to household income compose 15 percent of the sample, while those who contributed 51-75 percent of household income compose 26 percent of the sample.

³⁰ Summary statistics for each variable are provided in Appendix E, and full descriptions of the variables in the models in Appendix F.

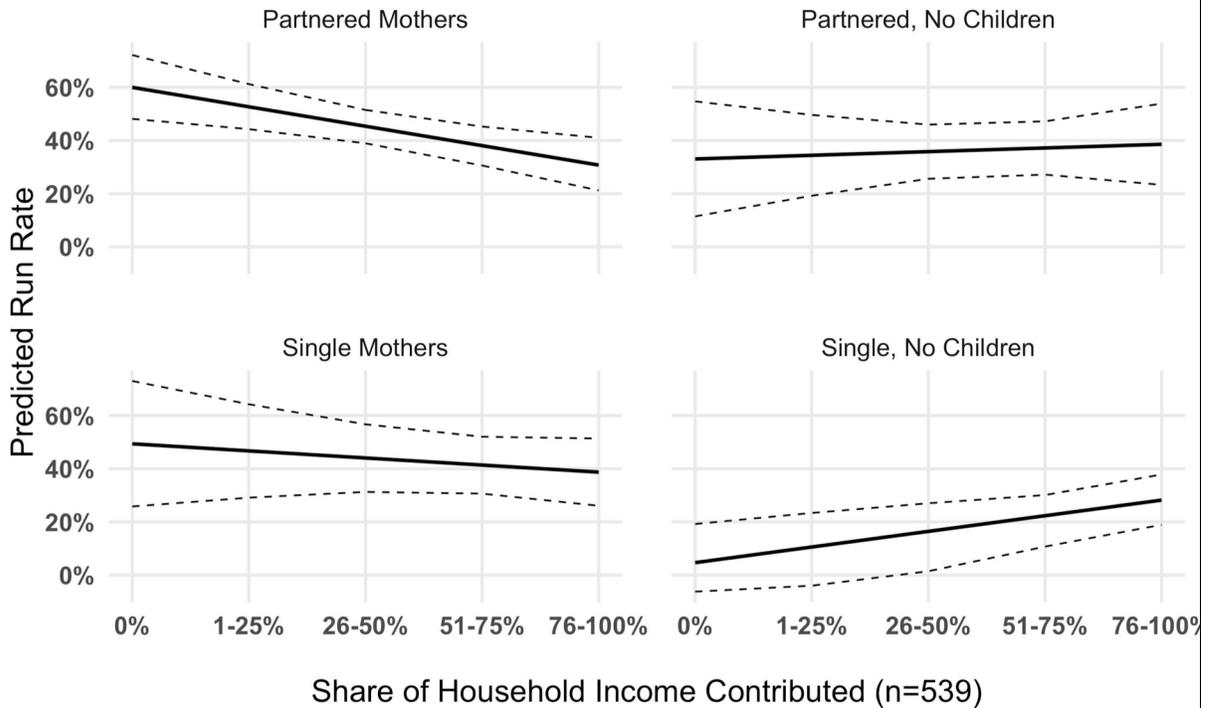
Figure 4: Among Political Novices, Household Contribution (i.e. Breadwinning) Lowers Run Rates, but Income Does Not.



Note: coefficient plots present separate OLS regressions showing how the probability of running among political novices (x-axis) is correlated with breadwinning (left column, n=598) and income (right column, n=562). Successive rows show how these correlations change when more variables are added to the regression cumulatively. Appendix G finds similar results in successive regressions, and Appendix H shows the effects hold using logistic regressions.

As Figure 4 shows, regardless of model specification, higher household income is uncorrelated with the decision to run. However, the strength of the breadwinner effect varies depending on the right-hand side variables included, though the point estimate is consistently negative. The biggest change in estimate occurs when variables related to family structure—marital status and having children—are added as controls. Why? Recall that we hypothesized an interaction effect between these variables and breadwinning that might change the “bite” of the breadwinner constraint. We investigate this in Figure 5 by testing for a simple interaction effect: do women with partners, or women with children, feel the constraints of being a breadwinner more or less sharply than those without?

Figure 5: Testing for an Interaction Effect: Household Composition Matters for Candidate Emergence.



Note: Predicted run rates using bivariate logistic regressions are reported with 95% confidence intervals. Only novices are included. Single respondents may not contribute to household income if they are students, widows, divorced, or have other access to wealth.

Is there a household composition interaction? Figure 5 illustrates the interaction between breadwinning and family structure using a simple logistic regression of candidate emergence on partner status and motherhood.³¹ Note that women coded as “single” may not contribute 100% of their household income for any variety of reasons: some are students or unemployed and receive support from some other member of their household (e.g., a parent, a sibling, a roommate, etc.); some are retired or widowed and may not think of the retirement or insurance benefits they receive as their “income;” and some are divorced or separated and receive alimony or other financial

³¹ Appendix L presents summary statistics for each group in order to provide richer detail on the sorts of individuals in each category (for instance, single non-mothers tend to be very young—many still students).

support. In the simple bivariate regressions depicted in Figure 5, we have no way to disentangle relevant confounders like age. However, the multivariate regressions presented in Figure 4 and Appendix G show that breadwinning remains a significant predictor even when these other variables are included as controls.

We can see in Figure 5 that non-working mothers with partners are the most likely group to run for office (top left), while non-mothers are as likely to run when they are breadwinners as when they are not, regardless of partner status (top and bottom right). Mothers, whether partnered (top left) or single (bottom left), feel the bite most sharply: the interaction effect between motherhood and breadwinning is strongly negative and statistically significant ($B=-7.12$, $p=0.026$). In contrast, single individuals show little evidence of a breadwinner effect (if anything, the slope is slightly positive), but evidence a large intercept shift: they are nearly 22 points less likely to run for office ($p=0.037$) than partnered individuals.

Do subjective financial concerns reveal similar patterns? Finally, we probe whether our claims about breadwinning (as measured through objective contribution to household income) appears to be supported by a subjective measure about fear of lost income. In the psychological battery (enumerated in Appendix F), survey respondents could select as many as 15 separate “fears” they held before deciding to run (if they ran) or that they currently held about running (if they had not yet run). One of the fears was “losing out on income while campaigning.”³² If we replicate the regressions depicted in Figure 4 but replace our original measure of household contributions with

³² Simple Pearson’s correlations show that selecting this fear has a mild positive correlation with our household contribution measure ($r=.21, p<0.001$) and a mild negative correlation with our income measure ($r=-.11, p=0.012$).

this measure of “fear of lost income,” we get even clearer results than our original objective measure did, as shown in Figure 6.³³

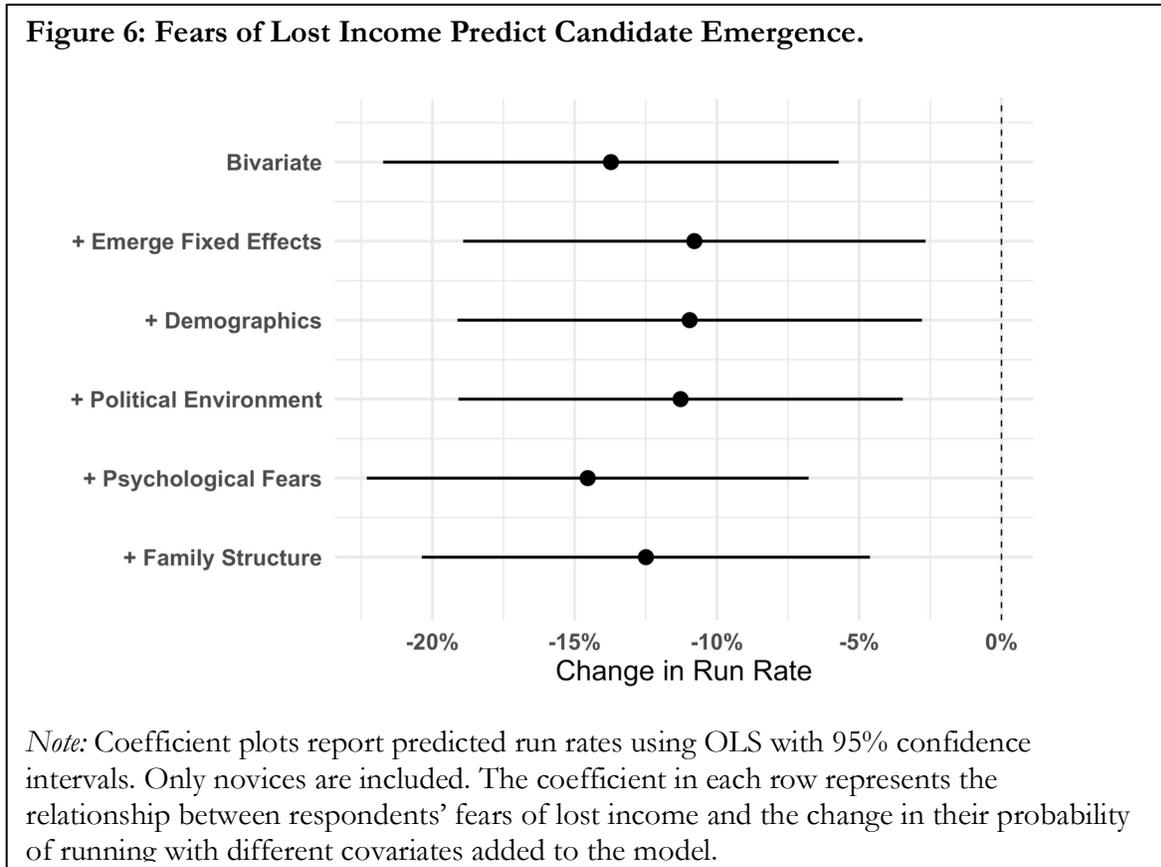


Figure 6 suggests that respondents’ fears of losing income while campaigning predict a lower likelihood of emerging as a candidate. In the simple bivariate regression, we see that a respondent’s decision to mark herself as afraid of losing her income is associated with a 13.72 percentage point decrease in candidate emergence ($p=0.001$). The size of these effects appear substantively larger at

³³ Note that for the regressions depicted in Figure 6, the psychological fear index, incorporated into the last two models (“+ Psychological Fears” and “+ Family Structure,” has been updated to remove fear of lost income from the psychological battery index).

first glance because the “lost income” variable is dichotomous. However, the estimates are actually quite similar to the net effect of moving from the bottom category of breadwinning (0% contribution) to the top category (76-100% contribution), while the bivariate regression (for example) using the objective measure suggests a total 16.6 percentage point decrease in candidate emergence. While we are reluctant to place undue weight on results using a measure that was conceived of and presented as part of a battery, convergent validation across both objective and subjective measures is reassuring.

In short, when women bear increasingly heavy responsibilities—being a solo head of household, and especially raising children—they are less likely to express their ambition.³⁴ However, if one does not have the additional burden of breadwinning, having children on its own does not depress candidacy. We thus see in the quantitative survey data the same sorts of structural and resource constraints that were expressed in open-ended answers.

Finally, to contextualize these estimates, it is worth recalling that the intense time commitment required by Emerge’s program poses a hard (conservative) test of our theories. If, for instance, most women who are breadwinners never even apply to the program because of the time commitment, our estimates would be attenuated due to reduced variation on the independent variable. Large studies of men and women in political feeder careers do not suggest that this is the case (see e.g. Fox and Lawless 2010), but even if their studies somehow failed to capture this effect,

³⁴ If the breadwinning effect is solely driven by pre-existing financial commitments, we might expect that owning a home, which entails large, long-term financial obligations—might work similarly to having children. We therefore compared the effects for homeowners (n=435) and non-homeowners (n=209). Although homeowners are much less likely to run for office in general, we do not see significant differences in the “bite” of breadwinning between the two groups (see Appendix I for full results and discussion).

this selection problem would suggest net effects of breadwinning (i.e., from earliest consideration of the possibility of running) larger than what we estimate here. In the next section, we dig into problems of selection bias in more detail.

Inferential Concerns

Our ability to make internally valid inferences about the decision to run for office among Emerge alumnae requires the absence of selection bias, and further requires that we haven't overlooked crucial omitted variables. First, to interpret the breadwinning constraint as causally related to emergence, women who enter the program as breadwinners need to be similar to those who are not breadwinners. Second, we consider whether the cost of running for higher levels of office is an omitted variable. Finally, to consider the general relevance of these inferences, we ask whether we should expect similar breadwinning constraints for men.

Are breadwinners different on other observable characteristics? A key empirical concern is that Emerge's admissions process may have selected candidates who, along with being breadwinners, were disadvantaged in other ways that correlate with the decision to run. We examine this possibility using *screening data* (Appendix K).

Emerge has a competitive interview process where multiple staff members (as many as ten people, typically five) weigh in on a candidate's dedication to running for office, prior service, and star power. From 2008-2012 the California branch interviewed 214 women, 94 of whom (45 percent) enrolled in the program. As part of the interview packet, applicants filled in basic demographic and employment information. We created a dataset with this information for all interviewees, and looked to see whether enrollees that are breadwinners were disadvantaged on

other observable dimensions at the interview stage.³⁵ Specifically, we know each applicant's age, race, immigrant status, union membership, total household income, and whether the applicant requested financial aid to cover the program costs. Appendix K compares these basic demographic categories for applicants to California's branch that did and did not enroll in the program.³⁶ Importantly, enrollment in the program was uncorrelated with the applicant's age, race, whether they requested financial aid, union membership, or whether they were first generation Americans.

The only variable that stands out for enrollees is household income: enrollees were richer (one-tailed $p=0.05$) than interviewees who did not enroll. However, applicants asking for financial aid were not disadvantaged in the selection process, supporting Emerge's claim that they are blind to financial need. When we linked the screening data to intake information about enrollees, we found no meaningful correlation between total household income and breadwinning (Pearson's $r=-0.12$, $p=0.99$). In other words, Emerge *did not select* breadwinning women from poorer households, but instead selected women from wealthier backgrounds, regardless of breadwinning.

We argue this bears on our earlier lack of evidence for an income constraint. If Emerge is more likely to admit women from wealthy families, this could attenuate the effect of income in our statistical analyses by removing variation from the lower end of the scale. Read in that light, it suggests that one potential avenue by which income "bites" could be through elite gate-keeping, rather than through an individual woman's self-selection into or out of politics (Carnes 2012, 2015, 2016).

³⁵ Likely because of legality, applicants were not asked about marriage, children, employment, or income contributions.

³⁶ Note that we do not know whether non-matriculantes were offered admission but declined, or not offered admission at all.

Costs of entering elections. Are the effects that we observe related to the costs of entering a political race? Most novice enrollees that ran did so in local and state races; only three novices in our dataset ran in national races. Among the enrollees who ran, breadwinners were slightly more likely to enter the least expensive races (such as local party committee positions) than they were to run in difficult-to-enter races, such as state senate races, but these differences were not statistically significant. In local party races (n=110), 60% of entrants were breadwinners; in city races (n=68), breadwinners made up 49% of entrants; and in state-level races (n=72), 51% were breadwinners. In contrast, among women who did not run (n=346), 63% are breadwinners. In other words, most breadwinners opted out of running at all, rather than selecting into less time- or cost-intensive races. We find no differences in average income by the level of office women sought.

What about Republicans? Another potential concern about the generalizability of our study is that Emerge only trains Democratic women to run for office, and that the dynamics we identify may not apply to Republican women. If the findings for our study were directly relevant to Republican women's political emergence, we would expect there to be a much larger share of that group running for office. This is because, as we show in Appendix L using American National Election Survey statistics, Republican women are more likely to be partnered with children, and full-time homemakers. In other words, Republican women should be structurally advantaged to become candidates.

Yet, as a growing literature on Republican women's political ambition shows, Republican women differ from Democratic women on many dimensions, and they tend to have even lower political ambition relative to co-partisan men than do Democratic women (e.g., Preece et al. 2016). It is outside the scope of this paper to adjudicate whether these baseline differences are related to different beliefs about social roles, or to issues like party recruitment (Gimenez et al. 2018), but we expect that the dynamics of emergence for Republican women closest to the pipeline's tap may be

different than those we observe here. Nevertheless, since the vast majority of female candidates (Sanbonmatsu and Carroll 2013), women's activist groups (Kreitzer and Osborne 2018), women in the pool of potential candidates (Crowder-Meyer and Lauderdale 2014, Lawless and Fox 2010), and female voters (Edlund and Pande 2002), are Democratic, our study covers the most populous group at all stages of the pipeline.

What about men? Although our focus in this study is on variation in candidate emergence *within* the group of women, it is natural to wonder how this generalizes to men. Men who are breadwinners, who face similar levels of risk (if they lose income) and time constraints, may also have lower political ambition. So what can we conclude from a women-only program?

Feminist scholars have long stressed that gender dynamics present greater burdens for working women than working men insofar as household labor is still largely a woman's domain (see Bianchi et al. 2012, Hook 2017, Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006, Teele et al. 2018). Yet it is an empirical question whether structural or resource constraints impinge on the expression of political ambition in a similar fashion for men and women. We cannot tackle this question directly using our data, but can gain some insight into this question comparing our findings to others' work.

In a series of papers utilizing their Citizen Political Ambition Survey, Lawless and Fox (2004, 2014a,b) and Lawless (2014) argue that women's under-representation stems primarily from women having less nascent political ambition than men. Fox and Lawless (2014b) examine the issue of the family's role in women's political ambition by comparing the average self-reported ambition of women and men in feeder careers (such as law and business) across variables such as whether they are married, have children, and do the majority of childcare or housework. They note that there are big differences in the baseline reported ambition between men and women (62 percent of men in these feeder fields voice nascent ambition, compared to 45 percent of women, a 17 percentage point

gap), but argue that the size of the ambition gap is not influenced by gender differences in household labor.³⁷

Our study, however, suggests that for the most likely female candidates, the conversion of nascent into expressive ambition is indeed correlated with household configuration and with breadwinning. Depending on the measure used, breadwinning is associated with a 13-16 total percentage point gap in expressive ambition. To put this figure in context, this difference is larger than the gender gap in expressive ambition in the Citizen Ambition Survey, which finds that 12 percent of men actually ran for office, compared with six percent of women (a six point gap).³⁸ In other words, for the most politically ambitious women, the breadwinner effect we observe is more than double the size of the long-touted 6 point gender gap in expressive ambition, and nearly the size of the 17 point gender gap in nascent ambition identified by Fox and Lawless in the Citizen Ambition Survey.

Other studies also give useful hints. Shames (2017) studies political ambition in a sample of elite graduate students in law and policy schools to investigate decision-making calculi “upstream” of the Lawless and Fox sample. Although the average age of the sample is young (25 years old), more than a quarter of respondents were partnered or married, and in that subgroup, women were already doing more of the household work. This finding is supported by decades of time-diary and other studies showing that although men today are doing more parenting and housework, women continue to spend more time than men on these activities.³⁹ And while it addressed participation far more generally and not running for office specifically, the largest to-date study of the gender gap in political participation in the United States found that even when men worked more hours in paid

³⁷ Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) question if “feeder fields” are equal pathways across genders.

³⁸ Authors’ calculations based on Fox and Lawless (2004, figure 1) and sample sizes.

³⁹ Hook 2017; Bianchi et al. 2012. See also Hochschild and Machung 2012; Williams 2000.

jobs, they also had more leisure time available for politics than did women (Burns et al. 2001: chapter 7). Indeed, Burns et al. (1997) find that husbands with greater control over home financial decisions were much *more* likely to participate politically than predicted based on other demographic and personality factors, while the same was not true for wives.

Recent reports from Pew and McKinsey, looking at gender and breadwinning in the general population, also show that far more women than men are non-partnered breadwinners for families. Pew (2013) speaks in particular of the rising trend of “breadwinner moms,” estimating that about 4 in 10 children grow up in households run by a single woman.⁴⁰ In addition, a WSJ/McKinsey research project from 2012, which surveyed over 4,000 employees at fourteen major companies, found that about half of the women in their sample were simultaneously primary breadwinners and primary caregivers, while most of the men who reported being breadwinners were not primary caregivers.⁴¹ In other words, even if breadwinning affected men and women in the same way, since there are far more female breadwinner-caregivers, more women than men would be impacted by these constraints.⁴²

⁴⁰ The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 17.2 million children live with a mother only, compared with 3.0 million living with a father only (Houston 2013).

⁴¹ Barsh and Yee 2012, 8.

⁴² A final interpretation suggested by a global literature on development incorporates both structural and psychological factors. Mothers’ marked sensitivity to the breadwinning constraint may reflect the fact that women tend to spend more of their income on their children, improving their children’s health and education outcomes (see Duflo 2012). We might thus expect mothers to be more reluctant than fathers to forego income if they see themselves as diverting money from their children rather than from more emotionally neutral types of spending (e.g., retirement savings).

Does Emerge Work?

A final question to consider is whether the Emerge training program “works” to get more women to enter politics.⁴³ This question is especially relevant given that Emerge appears to select women from wealthier households (even if they are similar on other dimensions such as race, age, immigration and union status). To gain traction on this question we need to know more about how women are selected into the program.

During the admissions process, Emerge screens all applications by scoring them on five different characteristics: commitment to run for elected office, prior campaign participation, leadership, commitment to service, and communication ability (see Appendix A). Each candidate can receive up to 25 points, or five points per category, where a 25 indicates “outstanding” suitability for the program; however, there is no rule or cut-off used to determine admission. We collected run histories for those California interviewees from 2008-2012 who did not enroll.

Women who enrolled in Emerge were much more likely to run for office (53%) than those who did not (24%). Even though there was a broad range of interviewer scores among both the enrolled (mean=20.4, SD=2.74, min=11, max=25) and the non-enrolled (mean=18.3, SD=3.09, min=9, max=25), a difference-of-means test reveals that enrollees received higher scores (difference=2.1, two-tailed $p < 0.001$). Among the non-enrolled, those who requested financial aid had lower screening scores (difference=-1.65, $p = 0.016$), and those with lower screening scores were less likely to run eventually for office (difference=4 points, $p = 0.005$). However, among enrollees, neither requests for financial aid nor initial screening scores were associated with running.

⁴³ To our knowledge, the only other study to directly test the efficacy of a gender recruitment intervention is Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece’s (2017) experiment with the Republican Caucus in Utah, which does not test the effects of a candidate training program.

We interpret these results to mean that Emerge’s selection bias toward the wealthy may be a function of score-based selection: in attempting to identify the most “outstanding” applicants, Emerge does a good job identifying those who are likely to run—and also advantages wealthier candidates. This makes sense given that previous research on both men and women has found that candidates are richer than average Americans (Carnes 2015, 2016). However, once enrolled, the program seems to have some “levelling” effect, making even women with low initial scores, including the less wealthy, as likely to run as higher-scoring peers. One might interpret this as evidence of program efficacy. For our purposes, we suggest that either selection bias against poorer candidates or the “levelling” effect of the program itself may be responsible for the null effect of household income on run rates.

Conclusion

Recent research emphasizes the importance of both fear-based and motivational concerns for explaining women’s lower nascent political ambition than men. Our work does not diminish these findings, but instead adds nuance. For women who are closest to making a decision to run for office, their ability to become candidates is heavily constrained by how they share financial burdens in the household and whether, if they have children, they can rely on another income. Most broadly, we find previously unobserved and important heterogeneity on the road to candidate emergence: even among women with nascent political ambition, some face a different set of constraints. These constraints fall heavily on breadwinners (especially mothers), after accounting for demographic differences in those groups and selection against less wealthy women during Emerge’s admissions process.⁴⁴ As described above, we do not expect these results to generalize to the whole population.

⁴⁴ Even when women are breadwinners they rarely have stay-at-home support (Williams 2000).

But by isolating the subset of women most likely to run for office in the U.S., we can offer a rare glimpse of candidate emergence in a theoretically important subgroup.

Our research suggests that new interventions may be needed to promote women's candidacies, especially in light of recent work which shows that women's absence from politics delegitimizes democracies.⁴⁵ Candidate training programs, such as Emerge America and its state affiliates, work hard to address women's fears, often explicitly basing program choices on the large literature on affective deterrents. Yet our data show that many of these women are unable to become candidates because of their financial responsibilities at home. If political parity with men is the goal, future research must explore new possibilities to alleviate the burden on women who are breadwinners. Such interventions may require much more extensive interventions than repeatedly "asking" women to run. Possibilities might include public subsidies for candidates' childcare, "candidate leave" policies that allow women to run while retaining all or part of their income, public funding for campaigns to alleviate the time burden of fundraising, allowing candidates to use campaign funds for childcare, and other institutional reforms.

Ultimately, the vast literature outside of political science testifying to the persistence of gender gaps in household and care work, coupled with the global rise of women as breadwinners, suggests that our findings have applicability for better understanding the factors that influence descriptive representation in this country and beyond. Though past research on the political economy of gender has often suggested that women's political equality would increase as they entered the workforce, through acquisition of skills, capital, and social networks (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001, Welch 1977), more recent work casts doubt on the ability of women with family obligations to overcome hurdles in the electoral arena (Gimenez et al. 2018, Silbermann 2015, Teele et al. 2018). Consistent with claims by scholars of class and race that material resources and

⁴⁵ E.g., Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019; Barnes and Burchard 2013.

structural advantages make descriptive representation easier for some groups to attain than others, our findings suggest that for one of the most marginalized categories of women, single moms, the road to political representation is incredibly long.⁴⁶ What is more, long term changes in family roles may not be enough to transform highly qualified, ambitious women—the best bets—into candidates. Perversely, for such women, breadwinning responsibilities, a signal of the long-awaited economic parity with men, may inhibit, rather than promote, conversion to candidacy.

⁴⁶ E.g., Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 1997, 2001; Carnes and Lupu 2016.

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