

# To Run or Not to Run for Office: Explaining Nascent Political Ambition

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*In this article, we develop the concept of nascent political ambition and offer the first empirical assessment of potential candidates' initial interest in seeking elective office. Our analysis is based on the Citizen Political Ambition Study—our national survey of nearly 3,800 individuals in the four professions that most frequently precede a career in politics. We find that a general sense of efficacy as a candidate, as well as a politicized upbringing, motivate well-situated potential candidates' inclinations to run for office. Alternatively, status as a member of a group historically excluded from politics depresses the likelihood of considering a candidacy. These findings shed light not only on the prospects for political representation and democratic legitimacy in the United States, but also the means by which to study candidate emergence and conceptualize political ambition.*

More than two centuries ago, the Founders worked to create a national legislature that allowed competent, successful citizens to serve their nation for a few years; the notion of career politicians was not something they envisioned. Certainly, over the last 200 years, politics have become increasingly professionalized. In the last 40 years alone, salaries and the perquisites of office have made serving in the House of Representatives or the Senate a quite lucrative profession (Stewart 2001). But Congress is somewhat of an anomaly. Most of the 500,000 elective offices in the United States are situated at the local and state levels. Many of these positions pay only a token salary and meet on a limited basis. Forty-two states, for example, have part-time legislatures; members must be available to serve for a few months each year, but they are also expected to maintain their professional careers (Gray, Hanson, and Jacob 2000; National Conference of State Legislatures 2003). The overwhelming majority of school boards and city councils also operate on a part-time basis. The sheer number of such positions indicates that a great many citizens in U.S. society are expected to hold public office. The very manner in which these positions are structured is geared to

allow politically interested individuals to step forward and serve as representatives of the people.

The extant research pertaining to the candidate emergence process, however, virtually ignores citizens' initial decisions to run for office. Considering a candidacy requires contemplating the courageous step of going before an electorate and opening oneself up to potential examination, scrutiny, and rejection by the public. Aside from a study focusing on potential candidates for Congress (Stone and Maisel 2003) and work investigating gender differences in political ambition (Fox and Lawless 2004), though, no broad empirical work explores the dynamics underlying the initial decision to run for public office. Instead, political scientists tend to focus on candidates and office holders—all of whom have *already* decided to run—and explore, retrospectively, the strategic nature of their political ambition (e.g., Berkman 1994; Canon 1993; Fowler and McClure 1989; Gaddie 2004; Maestas 2003; Squire 1988). Although these studies shed light on the cost/benefit analyses candidates and office holders employ when deciding whether to enter specific races, seek higher office, or retire from politics altogether, they do not aid in our understanding of whether or why certain

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people pursue elective positions in the first place. Yet understanding this aspect of candidate emergence is of central importance for a number of reasons.

Foremost, many researchers express concern over the quality of democratic governance and political legitimacy. A central criterion in evaluating the health of democracy in the United States is the degree to which citizens are willing to engage the political system and run for public office. As Thomas argues, “A government that is democratically organized cannot be truly legitimate if all its citizens . . . do not have a potential interest in and opportunity for serving their community and nation” (1998, 1). Mansbridge elaborates:

Easier communication with one’s representative, awareness that one’s interests are being represented with sensitivity, and knowledge that certain features of one’s identity do not mark one as less able to govern all contribute to making one feel more included in the polity. This feeling of inclusion in turn makes the polity democratically more legitimate in one’s eyes. (1999, 651)

Democratic legitimacy is a central justification for exploring all types of political participation (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995); running for political office simply represents the ultimate act.

The initial decision to run for office is also intertwined with fundamental issues of political representation. A compelling body of evidence suggests that particular sociodemographic groups are best able to represent the policy preferences of that group.<sup>1</sup> In addition, political theorists ascribe symbolic or role model benefits to a more diverse body of elected officials (Amundsen 1971; Bachrach 1967; Pitkin 1967).<sup>2</sup> If interest in seeking office is in any way restricted to citizens with certain demographic profiles, then serious questions emerge regarding descriptive and substantive representation.

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of women’s substantive representation, see Thomas 1994; Dodson 1998; and Swers 2002. For a review of race/ethnicity and representation, see Kerr and Miller 1997; Lublin 1997; and Canon 1999. For representation among impoverished citizens, see Hill and Leighley 1992 and Piven and Cloward 1997. And for evidence of the effects of openly gay legislators on domestic partnership policies, see Haider-Markel, Joslyn, and Kniss 2000.

<sup>2</sup>Although symbolic effects are difficult to measure empirically, the logic underlying symbolic representation suggests that the presence of elected officials from traditionally excluded groups enhances minority constituents’ identification with the political system. Mansbridge (1999) argues that, while unpopular among normative theorists, these descriptive and symbolic effects improve the deliberative function of democracy.

Finally, studying the initial decision to run for office is critical because it provides insight into who ultimately occupies high-level political office. In many cases, politics is a career ladder; politicians often move from local to state to national office (Black 1972; Jacobson 2000; Kazee 1994; Prinz 1993; Rohde 1979; Schlesinger 1966). More than three-quarters of the members of the U.S. Congress, for instance, have previous political experience (Canon 1990). If we want to establish a better understanding of, and predictive capacity for identifying, the types of citizens who will ultimately serve in policymaking positions at all levels, then the initial decision to run serves as a critical platform from which to launch an investigation.

In this article, we develop and examine the concept of *nascent political ambition*—the embryonic or potential interest in office seeking that precedes the actual decision to enter a specific political contest. In order to develop this broader conception of political ambition and offer the first empirical assessment of the initial decision to run for office, we conducted the Citizen Political Ambition Study—a national survey of nearly 3,800 individuals in the four professions that most frequently precede a career in politics. We employ the literatures on political participation and candidate emergence to generate and operationalize several expectations concerning the factors that spur potential candidates to consider running for office. The results of our analysis indicate that a general sense of efficacy as a candidate, as well as a politicized upbringing, motivate well-situated potential candidates’ inclinations to consider running for office. Alternatively, status as a member of a group historically excluded from politics depresses the likelihood of considering a candidacy. These findings shed light not only on the prospects for democratic legitimacy in the United States, but also the means by which to study candidate emergence and conceptualize political ambition.

## The Initial Decision to Run for Office: Developing a Theory of Nascent Ambition

Political scientists have long been interested in political ambition and the factors that motivate individuals to seek positions of political power. Indeed, more than half a century ago, Lasswell laid the groundwork for this type of investigation when he observed that the “conception of a ‘political type’ is that some personalities are power seekers, searching out the power institutions of the society . . . and devoting themselves to the capture and use of government” (1948, 20). The early empirical research on

political ambition promoted Lasswell's notion of the "political person"; accordingly, the quest to understand why people pursued political power, regardless of the level of office, focused on individuals' personal attributes, personalities, and motivations (Barber 1965; Fishel 1971; Soule 1969).

With the release of *Ambition and Politics* in 1966, however, Joseph Schlesinger fundamentally changed the manner by which scholars approach the study of political ambition. He put forward a rational choice paradigm to understand the decision to run for office. The rational choice framework conceptualizes political ambition as primarily a strategic response to a political opportunity structure. More specifically, potential candidates are more likely to seek office when they face favorable political and structural circumstances (Black 1972; Levine and Hyde 1977). The number of open seats, term-limit requirements, levels of legislative professionalization, partisan composition of the constituency, and party congruence with constituents are among the factors individuals consider when seeking any elective positions or deciding whether to run for higher office (Black 1972; Eulau and Prewitt 1973; Goodliffe 2001; Kazee 1994; Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001; Rohde 1979; Schlesinger 1966; Stone and Maisel 2003). With the exception of general gauges of political interest, financial security, and political experience, potential candidates' personal circumstances are treated as relatively exogenous. In other words, the "seats available and the hierarchy of positions for advancement give shape and definition to the political career" (Prinz 1993, 27).<sup>3</sup>

Focusing on the political and structural circumstances involved in running for a particular office has enabled scholars to generate broad theoretical contributions to our understanding of *expressive ambition*—that is, whether individuals will choose to enter specific political contests and, once they hold office, whether legislators will exhibit static versus progressive ambition, or whether they will choose to retire rather than seek reelection (discrete ambition). But a distinct, yet vitally important phase of the development of political ambition occurs well before the actual decision to enter a specific race ever transpires. If the notion of a candidacy has never even crossed an individual's mind, then he/she never actually faces a political

opportunity structure. By focusing on expressive ambition and a set of specific races and candidates, therefore, much of the literature that speaks to political ambition bypasses an earlier stage of the candidate emergence process. In order to understand fully the decision dynamics involved in moving from "eligible potential candidate" to "actual office holder," it is necessary to step back and assess *nascent ambition*—or the inclination to consider a candidacy.

Because nascent political ambition serves as a critical precursor to expressive ambition and the strategic factors associated with it, a more complete theoretical framework through which to study candidate emergence must include this earlier stage. Figure 1 depicts our conception of political ambition and the candidate emergence process. Consistent with the rational choice paradigm, we view expressive ambition as a phenomenon driven by the political opportunity structure a potential candidate faces. The inclination to consider a candidacy, however, is far less proximate to a particular race than is expressive ambition. In this initial step of the candidate emergence process, we suggest that interest in seeking elective office will be motivated not only by individual-level "strategic" considerations, but also by attitudinal dispositions, personal experiences, and demographic characteristics that fall outside the realm of the political opportunity structures to which most existing political ambition theory refers. Essentially, as we step back and assess whether a potential candidate will face the opportunity structure the rational choice paradigm identifies, we must invoke some of the theoretical underpinnings from the earlier work on political ambition.

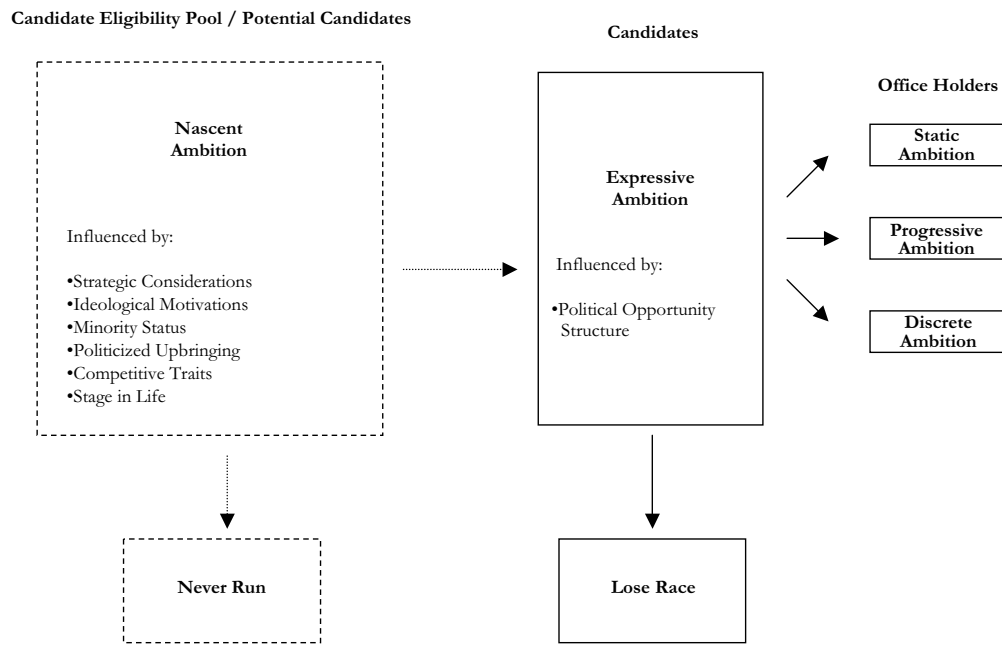
To shed light on the factors that affect the critical beginning stages of the candidate emergence process, we draw on theory and empirical evidence from the existing literatures on both political ambition and political participation at the mass level. Ultimately, we derive six expectations about the factors that will foment potential candidates' nascent ambition. The evolution of political ambition at the individual level is an intricate phenomenon, and, undoubtedly, many of the expectations we identify are linked to one another. We do anticipate, though, that each will exert an independent effect on a citizen's likelihood of considering a candidacy.

### "Strategic" Considerations Expectation

We know from a wide body of literature that politicians tend to behave in ways that maximize their likelihood of attaining higher office, or at least maintaining the

<sup>3</sup>Rohde's (1979) conception of progressive ambition is somewhat of an exception, in that it does not depend entirely on the political opportunity structure. He builds on the Lasswell tradition by acknowledging that individuals assess the risks involved in seeking higher office differently, even when faced with the same political context. Individual-level characteristics and personality traits, in essence, can affect political career decisions.

**FIGURE 1 Nascent Political Ambition and the Candidate Emergence Process**



position they currently hold (Schlesinger 1966). Studies of congressional retirement, for instance, conclude that as an electoral margin decreases, so, too, does a member’s likelihood of seeking reelection (e.g., Moore and Hibbing 1998; Theriault 1998). For many members of Congress, it is preferable to exit the chamber voluntarily, as opposed to engage in an arduous reelection bid that might end in defeat. Perceptions of electoral success have also been shown to be the most important predictor of whether an individual decides to enter his/her first congressional race (Maisel and Stone 1997). The variables that scholars typically think of as “strategic,” therefore, tend to be relatively short term and linked to the external political environment.

Strategic considerations might also play a role in fostering nascent ambition, although we argue that they might manifest themselves somewhat differently. If a potential candidate does not deem himself/herself qualified to run for office, then considering a candidacy is probably unlikely. For some subset of potential candidates, this assessment may be based on short-term electoral considerations and the structural forces at work in the political environment. For most potential candidates, however, strategic considerations are probably more abstract. Because nascent ambition precedes the stage at which a potential candidate faces a political opportunity structure, we expect individuals’ estimates of their personal attributes and feelings of efficacy as political candi-

dates, in general, to exert an impact on considering entering the electoral arena.

### Ideological and Political Interest Expectation

A “resource-based” model of political participation accounts for much of the variation we see in citizens’ levels of political interest and activity (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Individuals with time, money, and civic skills are significantly more likely than resource-deprived citizens to engage in various forms of political activism. But specific issue motivations can compensate for, as well as bolster, individual-level resources. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 398) recognize that having a direct stake in a policy may increase an individual’s likelihood to participate politically around that issue (see also Craig and O’Brien 1993; Lawless and Fox 2001; Verba and Nie 1972).

Issue passion spurs activism not only at the mass level, but also among political elites. Canon (1990), for example, finds that strong policy goals serve as motivating factors for congressional candidates who have no previous political experience (see also Wilson 1962). Other studies reveal that, once individuals actually seek and hold state legislative positions, ideological preferences and passion often motivate their agendas (e.g., Thomas 1994). Hence, because running for office tends to require high

levels of money, time, and civic skills—or at least potential candidates might perceive it that way—we expect individuals to be more likely to contemplate a candidacy when an ideological drive, either by a particular issue, or a general interest in politics, accompanies their resource base.

### Politicized Upbringing Expectation

Political science scholarship uses the family unit as a medium through which to understand political participation. Studies of candidates and office holders conclude that an “inherited” interest in political affairs oftentimes accounts for the decision to enter politics, regardless of sociodemographic background or personality (see Flanigan and Zingale 2002). We have to look no further back than to the 2000 presidential election—which pitted the son of a former senator against the son of a former president—to see that history is rife with politicians from different generations of the same family. Family ties are also often evident among state legislators (Gaddie 2004) and even city council members (Prewitt 1970b).

Not only is political interest often passed on within the family unit (Jennings and Markus 1984, Table 6), but attitudes about what constitutes good citizenship also become deeply embedded. Beck and Jennings find, for instance, that highly politicized parents often create a family environment “charged with positive civic orientations . . . thus endowing their children with the motivation prerequisites for later [political] participation” (1982, 98; see also Almond and Verba 1963). This political socialization process instills in future citizens the belief that they, as individuals, have the power to influence government action. These attitudes, once impressed, can be sustained into adulthood. In fact, involvement in political associations, campaigns, and school elections can predict future levels of interest in politics (Prewitt 1970b; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), as well as future levels of political activism (Beck and Jennings 1982; Gaddie 2004). Accordingly, we expect politicized upbringings to inflate an individual’s perceptions of his/her qualifications to run for office and, ultimately, to bolster the likelihood of possessing nascent ambition.

### Minority Status Expectation

The vast majority of elected bodies in the United States continue to be dominated by white men.<sup>4</sup> With so few

<sup>4</sup>Men comprise 85% of members in the U.S. Congress, 84% of state governors, 80% of mayors, 77% of state legislators, and 73% of statewide-elected officials (CAWP 2004). In terms of racial diversity, Barack Obama (D-IL) is the only black U.S. senator; there are

women and minorities elected to prominent positions of political power, members of historically excluded populations may feel like the political system is not open to them. Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001), for instance, find that women who live in areas with higher densities of female-elected officials are more likely to express interest in politics (see also Hansen 1997; but see Lawless 2004). In terms of race, Bobo and Gilliam (1990) find that sociopolitical participation among blacks increases dramatically in cities with black mayors (see also Hamilton 1986). Conversely, blacks who do not live in these “empowerment areas” are significantly less likely to participate in community activities, contact elected officials, and vote. Essentially, candidates and elected officials who elicit group identification can stimulate voter turnout and political activism (Abney 1974; Abney and Hutcheson 1981; Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001).

A similar logic likely applies in terms of political ambition; if traditionally excluded groups are less likely to have role models to emulate, they may be less likely to consider running for office. This expectation is consistent with the research that finds that gender and race affect office holders and candidates’ progressive ambition (Costantini 1990; Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001). Somewhat more indirectly, members of traditionally marginalized groups may also be less likely to possess other key ingredients that foster nascent ambition, such as a sense of efficacy in oneself as a candidate and a politicized upbringing.<sup>5</sup>

### Competitive Traits Expectation

Schlesinger begins his path-breaking work by stating flatly: “Ambition lies at the heart of politics” (1966, 1). There is broad acceptance of the notion that anyone who ultimately decides to seek high-level office is competitive and driven. Clear indications of ambitious behavior in realms outside of politics, therefore, can help predict who might consider running for office. More specifically,

no black state governors. The proportions of black members of the House of Representatives (9%) and state legislatures (8%) are also lower than the population proportion of 12% (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies 2000).

<sup>5</sup>It is also important to note that recruitment to public office is a selective process reflecting various dimensions of social stratification (e.g., Eulau and Prewitt 1973; Matthews 1984; Prewitt 1970b). If encouragement to run for office is a critical predictor of whether one actually considers running for office or seeks reelection, then groups that have been historically excluded from serving in elective office might show less interest in pursuing political careers. Our analyses will control for whether an individual ever received the suggestion to run for office from a political actor, so as not to confound the independent effects of sex, race, and ethnicity with recruitment.

individuals who select high-prestige occupations and seek to rise to the top of their professions may be more likely to think about acquiring positions of political power or climbing the political career ladder (Hain and Pierson 1975). Further, material ambition and financial success may weigh heavily on whether an individual has the flexibility to consider running for office. Recent congressional elections have seen an increase in candidates who are political amateurs with substantial monetary resources (Canon 1990; Chaddock 2001). Even nonwealthy candidates must invest a substantial amount of their own money if they are to be considered serious congressional contenders.

Although we expect citizens with high levels of career and material ambition to be more inclined to *consider* entering the political arena, we acknowledge that they may be less likely actually to launch a candidacy; moving into the political arena from the private sector might involve a substantial decrease in pay (see Ehrenhalt 1991; Rohde 1979; Prewitt 1970a).<sup>6</sup> Eulau and Prewitt (1973, 239) find this to be the case even in local politics; wealthier communities are characterized by less city council electoral competition than poorer communities.

### Stage in Life Expectation

Studies of political participation suggest that age, marital status, and parental status positively affect levels of political participation at the mass level (e.g., Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). The all-consuming nature of running for office, however, may mean that age and family arrangements exert a different type of effect on potential candidates' initial decisions to run for office. Younger men and women may have more energy to enter politics, endure the rigors of a campaign, and engage in the activities necessary for networking and fundraising (Fowler and McClure 1989; Huckshorn and Spencer 1971; Swinerton 1968). In fact, among office-holding national political convention delegates, younger delegates are more likely than delegates over the age of 55 to express interest in seeking higher office at some point in the future (Gaddie 2004, 25). But younger men and women may also be more likely to face the difficulties involved in reconciling a career and a family. A study of members of the candidate-eligibility pool in New York, for example, found some, though not overwhelming, evidence that traditional family structures decrease the likelihood of running for all levels of office (Fox and Lawless 2003; see also Conway, Steuernagel, and Ahern 1997; Sapiro 1982). Members who leave the House

of Representatives also often reference the fact that the "family-unfriendly" schedule of Congress makes it difficult to balance career and familial responsibilities (Theriault 1998, 421). State legislators mention the trials and tribulations of maintaining this "balancing act" as well (Gaddie 2004). Although the empirical evidence offers competing expectations regarding the degree to which family structures and placement in the life cycle might affect potential candidates' choices, we anticipate that age, as well as marital and parental status, will make seeking elective office more viable at different points in a potential candidate's life.

Together, these six research expectations represent a series of personal attributes and characteristics that may influence the development of nascent political ambition. In order to argue compellingly that nascent ambition is, in fact, a precursor to, and a distinct phenomenon from, expressive ambition, though, our six research expectations must withstand controls for the structural and contextual variables that tend to predict whether an individual opts to enter a particular race at a specific time. Structural factors and contextual considerations, after all, even play a substantial role in local politics, where election dynamics tend to mirror campaigns for state and federal office (Fleischmann and Stein 1998; Krebs 1998). Thus, we expect to uncover support for our expectations even after controlling for measures of political culture, size and openness of the political opportunity structure, and levels of legislative professionalization, as well as respondents' party congruence with elected officials in the state and their perceived likelihood of winning the first race they could envision entering.

### Studying the Early Stages of Candidate Emergence

Despite the theoretical importance of studying nascent political ambition, a number of methodological and sample design issues make conducting an empirical investigation quite difficult. The complexity of assembling a national sample of potential candidates, alone, explains why most research on political ambition and candidate emergence focuses on declared candidates and office holders. In an attempt to overcome these difficulties, we developed the "eligibility pool approach," which we carried out in the Citizen Political Ambition Study. We drew a national sample of 6,800 individuals from the professions and backgrounds that tend to yield the highest proportion of political candidacies: law, business, education, and political/community activism (Dolan and Ford 1997;

<sup>6</sup>Perhaps for this very reason, studies that address the impact of household income on political ambition produce mixed results (Fowler 1996; Maisel and Stone 1997; Stone 1980).

Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001).<sup>7</sup> Based on survey responses from nearly 3,800 members of the “candidate eligibility pool,” the data from the Citizen Political Ambition Study allow us to offer the first nuanced assessment of the manner in which individuals emerge as candidates for the first public office they might seek. For a complete description of the research design and sample, as well as a discussion of its advantages, see Fox and Lawless (2004).

Although the Citizen Political Ambition Study represents a methodological breakthrough, it is important to acknowledge two specific limitations involved in employing the “eligibility pool approach.” Our method means that we must forego a nuanced analysis of the structural and contextual variables that might exert an impact on the decision to enter the electoral arena. If we focused on a single race or election, the number of potential candidates would be extremely small. We assembled a broad sample at the expense of analyzing the political opportunity and structural aspects of the decision calculus in any particular race or set of races. The absence of a specific office focus does mean, however, that we are limited in the extent to which we can assess the effects constituency demographics, incumbency, and other sources of strategic calculations and political opportunities exert on the inclination to consider a candidacy. Second, our approach relies on potential candidates’ self-perceived qualifications and prospects for success, as opposed to more objective indicators of their electoral viability. Thus, our results might reflect a distorted version of reality. Because we are interested in the consideration process members of the eligibility pool undergo, however, self-perceptions are perhaps as relevant as are objective assessments of the potential candidates’ likelihood of winning. After all, individuals often distort the probability of winning an election, but engage in behavior based on these distortions.<sup>8</sup> In short, what our approach sacrifices in precision and leverage in predicting who will enter a specific race at a specific time it makes up

<sup>7</sup>We stratified by sex so that we could more fully investigate gender differences in political ambition and assess this aspect of political representation and democratic legitimacy. We acknowledge, however, that women comprise far less than 50% of the current eligibility pool.

<sup>8</sup>Our data do not suggest that these self-perceptions depend heavily on the level of office under consideration. Sixty-four percent of respondents who stated that a local office is the first they would seek contend that they would be “unlikely” or “very unlikely” to win. Sixty percent of individuals who would pursue the state legislature as their first office believe they would be “unlikely” or “very unlikely” to win. And 63% of respondents who would seek a statewide or federal office first think that the prospects of winning are “unlikely” or “very unlikely.”

for in terms of the broad-based nature of the sample. By turning to this earlier stage of the candidate-emergence process, our focus not only complements investigations of expressive ambition, but also allows us to provide fresh insights pertaining to democratic legitimacy and political representation.

## Nascent Ambition in the Candidate Eligibility Pool

Our sample of potential candidates is comprised of successful individuals who are well positioned to seek public office. Thus, it is important to begin our investigation of nascent political ambition with an overall examination of the degree to which this population thinks about entering the political arena as candidates. We asked the members of our sample—directly—whether they ever considered running for office. Although the proportion of respondents who considered running differs by profession, with lawyers (53%) and political activists (64%) more likely to have considered a candidacy than educators (37%) and businessmen and women (32%), the data presented in Table 1 indicate that, overall, almost half of the respondents acknowledge having thought about running for

**TABLE 1** Considering a Political Candidacy

	Percent Responding “Yes”
<b>Considering a Candidacy</b>	
Ever Contemplated a Candidacy	47%
Would Consider Running for Office in the Future	58
<b>Concrete Steps Preceding a Candidacy</b>	
Discussed Running with Party Leaders	5
Discussed Running with Community Leaders	8
Solicited Financial Contributions from Potential Supporters	2
Investigated How to Place Name on the Ballot	5
Ever Taken Any of the Concrete Steps	13
N	3,212

*Note:* Each entry in the table is out of 100%. For the “Concrete Steps Preceding a Candidacy” entries, each percentage indicates the proportion of respondents who report engaging in each activity. Numbers do not total 100% because respondents could have taken anywhere between zero and four steps.

office. Nearly three out of every five respondents express some degree of interest in seeking office in the future.

Moving beyond perceptual indicators, we also investigated whether respondents ever took any of the concrete steps that serve as precursors to seeking elective office. We asked the members of the sample whether they ever investigated how to place their name on the ballot, or ever discussed running with potential donors, party leaders, or community activists. Few respondents have ever taken multiple steps required to mount a political campaign, but 13% have engaged in at least one concrete activity that typically precedes launching a candidacy. Of those who actually considered running for office, 27% discussed a potential candidacy with an electoral gatekeeper, solicited financial contributions, or investigated placing their name on the ballot.

An examination of the inclination to run for office must also address the level of office in which potential candidates express interest. In order to determine where the respondents focus their office specific interests, we asked the 58% of the sample respondents who expressed interest in a future candidacy to state the first office they would seek, should they enter a political contest. We then presented them with a list of several local, state, and federal positions and asked whether they would ever consider running for any of those posts. The data presented in Table 2 reveal an awareness of career ladder politics. Nearly 70% of respondents select a local office—school board, city council, or mayor—as the first office for which they might run, whereas only 10% consider entering the political arena at the federal level. Although most of the potential candidates state that, should they ultimately choose to run for office, they will get involved at the bottom rung of the ladder, 41% indicate interest in eventually running for the state legislature. Approximately one out of every three respondents identified at least one federal-level position he/she would ultimately be interested in pursuing. This finding reinforces the importance of homing in on the initial decision to run, since most potential candidates would opt to enter lower level races before seeking entry into state level or congressional races.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>In light of these findings, it is important to acknowledge a limitation of the business subsample. Many local- and state-level office holders are small business owners or self-employed entrepreneurs. Our business subsample, however, is drawn from a national listing of corporate executives, many of whom may be less likely to have the time or professional support to seek local- or state-level office. Indeed, the lower response rate and lower levels of nascent ambition among the business subsample may account, at least in part, for many of the tradeoffs businesspeople face when considering entering the electoral arena. That said, we uncovered only small interprofessional differences in terms of respondents' attitudes toward the

**TABLE 2 Potential Candidates' Office-Specific Interests**

	First Office Potential Candidate Would Seek	Potential Candidates' Interest in Other Offices
<b>Local or Community Office</b>		
School Board	39 %	56 %
City Council	26	51
Mayor	4	19
<b>State-Level Office</b>		
State Legislator	18	41
Statewide Office (i.e., State Treasurer)	2	12
Governor	1	12
<b>Federal Office</b>		
House of Representatives	7	23
Senate	3	21
President	0	6
N	1,854	1,854

*Note:* Entries in the “First Office Potential Candidate Would Seek” column indicate the percentage of respondents who state each office as the first office for which they would run, if they were to enter a campaign. Entries in the “Interest in Other Offices” column indicate the percentage of respondents who would ever consider running for each specified position. N includes only those individuals who would consider running for office in the future and who have never actually sought an elective position.

In order to determine why some potential candidates possess nascent ambition, while others do not, we developed two logistic regression equations, both of which are presented in Table 3. The models operationalize the six research expectations that predict the two aspects of nascent ambition we identified (see Appendix for a description of the variable coding), as well as the series of structural/contextual variables that predict expressive ambition.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the models control for party

degree to which having more free time would affect their interest in seeking office. Moreover, of those businessmen and women who possess nascent ambition, the ratios of interest in local and state office to national office are similar to the members of the other professional subsamples.

<sup>10</sup>These structural and contextual variables also account for much of the geographic dispersion of the sample (24% of respondents are from northeastern states; 24% are from west coast states; 24% are from midwestern states; and 28% are from southern states). When we include region dummy variables in the models, they do not achieve statistical significance. We do not include state-level controls because they are highly collinear with the structural variables in the models.

**TABLE 3** Contemplating a Candidacy: Logistic Regression Coefficients (and Standard Errors) Predicting Potential Candidates' Interest in Running for Office

	Ever Considered Running for Office	Interested in High-Level Office
<b>“Strategic” Considerations</b>		
Self-Perceived Qualifications	.63 (.06)**	.60 (.07)**
<b>Ideological Motivations</b>		
Issue Passion	-.00 (.04)	-
Political Interest	.11 (.04)**	-
<b>Minority Status</b>		
Woman	-.53 (.10)**	-.83 (.13)**
Black	-.64 (.18)**	-.36 (.22)
Latino/a	-.05 (.23)	.05 (.26)
<b>Politicized Upbringing</b>		
Family Socialization	.14 (.05)**	.10 (.06)
Parents Ran for Office	.23 (.14)	-.20 (.17)
Ran for Office in School	.28 (.10)**	.35 (.12)**
<b>Competitive Traits</b>		
Career Ambition	.03 (.07)	.35 (.09)**
Material Ambition	-.04 (.08)	-.00 (.11)
Current Income	-.16 (.05)**	.21 (.07)**
<b>Stage in Life</b>		
Married	.07 (.13)	-.57 (.16)**
Have Children Living at Home	.01 (.11)	-.32 (.13)*
Age	-.03 (.01)**	-.03 (.01)**
<b>Structural / Contextual Variables</b>		
Self-Perceived Likelihood of Winning	.11 (.06)	-
Gore Vote in 2000	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Term Limits	.22 (.12)	-.00 (.15)
Part-Time Legislature	.18 (.14)	-.29 (.17)
Legislative Salary	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
State Political Opportunity Structure	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Local Political Opportunity Structure	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Seats in Congressional Delegation	-.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Party Congruence with State Legislature	-.12 (.13)	.03 (.15)
Party Congruence with House Delegation	.02 (.12)	.08 (.14)
Constant	-1.68 (.65)**	-2.62 (.75)**
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	.44	.30
Percent Correctly Predicted	76.1	73.7
N	2,745	1,640

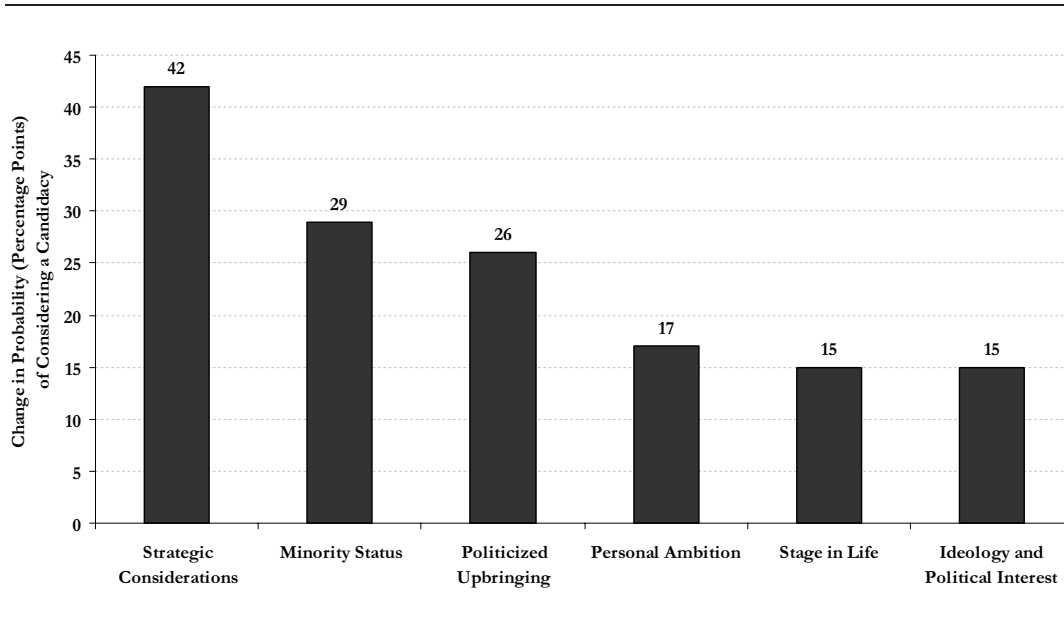
*Note:* Levels of significance: \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05. Equations also include fixed effects for the professions and controls for party identification, levels of political involvement, and whether the individual ever received the suggestion to run for office from a party leader, elected official, or political activist. The number of cases for the second equation is restricted to respondents who have considered a candidacy, but who have never actually sought an elective position. The reduced sample sizes in both equations result from list-wise deletion.

identification, levels of political engagement, and whether the individual ever received the suggestion to run for office from a political source (i.e., party leader, elected official, or political activist). The first model predicts whether the respondent has ever considered running for

office.<sup>11</sup> In the second model, we estimate interest in running for high-level office (statewide or federal). We

<sup>11</sup>The results are nearly identical when we conduct an analysis predicting whether a respondent engaged in any of the concrete steps typically required to mount a political campaign.

**FIGURE 2 Who Considers Running for Office? Substantive Effects of Predictors of Nascent Political Ambition**



*Note:* Changes in probabilities are based on the logistic regression results presented in Table 3, column 1. These probabilities were calculated by setting all continuous independent variables to their means and dummy variables to their modes for the five expectations not under consideration. Within each individual expectation, we assessed the maximum change in probability for each statistically significant variable (i.e., the minority status probability reflects the fact that a black woman is 26 percentage points less likely than a white man, all else equal, to consider running for office). For age, we varied the values from one standard deviation above to one standard deviation below the mean.

restrict the latter equation to respondents who have considered running for office, since an office-specific preference requires at least a general inclination to enter the electoral arena.<sup>12</sup> Together, these two measures allow us to gauge retrospective and prospective interest in seeking office.<sup>13</sup>

A general review of the findings indicates that the models perform well. The regression coefficients reveal that each expectation offers some degree of leverage in

<sup>12</sup>For the “interest in high-level office” equation, we do not include the ideological and political interest variables since the sample is restricted to individuals who have considered a candidacy and identified office-specific preferences. Nearly all of the respondents exhibited high levels of political interest. We also omit from the equation whether the respondent contends he/she is likely to win the first race he/she would enter, as winning a first race might affect willingness to enter politics in the future, but not at any particular level.

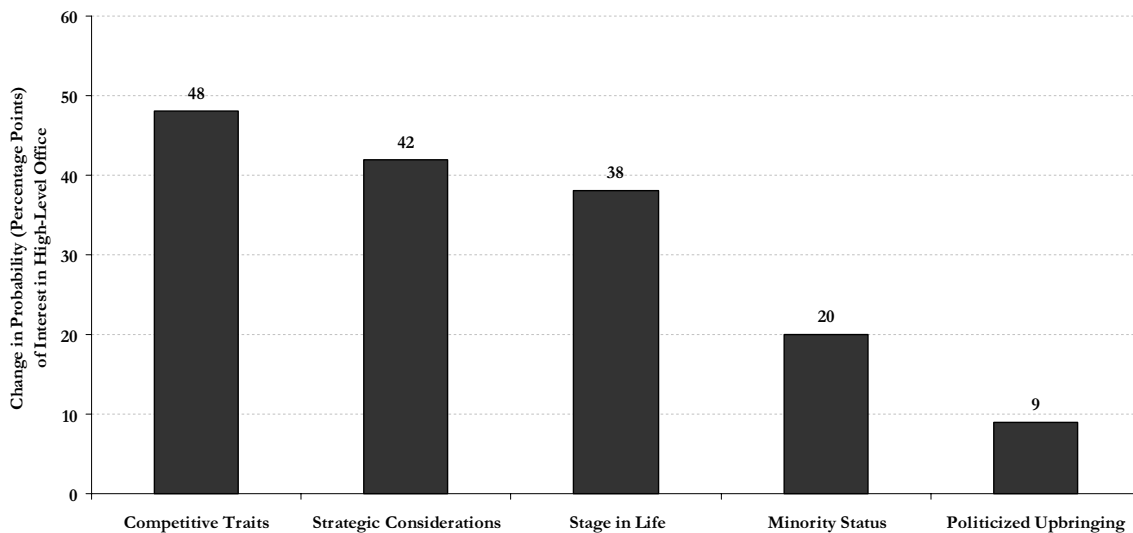
<sup>13</sup>Prior to explicating the findings, it is important to note that individuals who harbor ambitions for public life might also be more likely to self-select into careers that offer a more likely path to politics. This might be particularly true in the cases of attorneys and political activists. Thus, we performed the regression analyses separately on each professional subsample. Our results did not reveal any substantively or statistically meaningful differences; the same dynamics affect nascent political ambition across the professions. Because the base levels of political ambition vary by profession, however, the equations include fixed effects for each profession.

predicting whether a potential candidate has ever considered running for office (Table 3, column 1). And when we focus on respondents who acknowledge interest in seeking public office, the data suggest that “strategic” considerations, minority status, a politicized upbringing, competitive traits, and stage in life are also statistically significant predictors of interest in high-level office (Table 3, column 2). Figures 2 and 3 illustrate that the independent variables that comprise each of our expectations are not only statistically significant, but also exert substantive impacts on the likelihood of considering a candidacy and the probability of expressing interest in high-level office. Nascent political ambition, therefore, is shaped by a variety of personal and political experiences and circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

Although many of the results that emerge from the regression analyses are consistent with our expectations, three broad findings merit further discussion, both because of the magnitude of their impact and because they

<sup>14</sup>The only statistically significant control variable is recruitment from a “political source.” Receiving the suggestion to run for office from a party leader, elected official, or nonelected political activist boosts respondents’ likelihood of considering a candidacy nearly 40% and the probability of expressing interest in high-level office by approximately 10%. These recruitment effects do not interact significantly with any of the other variables.

**FIGURE 3** Who Will Climb the Political Career Ladder? Substantive Effects of Predictors of Interest in High-Level Office



*Note:* Changes in probabilities are based on the logistic regression results presented in Table 3, column 2. These probabilities were calculated by setting all continuous independent variables to their means and dummy variables to their modes for the four expectations not under consideration. Within each individual expectation, we assessed the maximum change in probability for each statistically significant variable (i.e., the minority status probability reflects the fact that a woman is 20 percentage points less likely than a man, all else equal, to consider running for office; in this equation, race did not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance, so we did not vary its “value”). For age, we varied the values from one standard deviation above to one standard deviation below the mean.

speak directly to issues of representation, career ladder politics, and the theoretical and methodological importance of examining nascent ambition.

### “Strategic” Considerations as a Precursor to Expressive Ambition

The most appropriate place to begin to explicate the findings is with the strategic considerations expectation; a substantive interpretation of the regression coefficients in Table 3 reveals that a general sense of efficacy as a candidate, as gauged by self-perceived qualifications, exerts the greatest relative impact on nascent ambition (see Figure 2). Despite the fact that all of the members of our sample are roughly similar in terms of objective qualifications and credentials, variation in perceptions affects the likelihood of considering a candidacy. Respondents who deem themselves “very qualified” to run for office have a 0.75 likelihood of having considered a candidacy.<sup>15</sup> This predicted probability is 37% greater than that of an

otherwise “average” respondent, and roughly two-and-one-third times the likelihood of a respondent who considers himself “very unqualified.” Moreover, the ability of an individual to imagine himself/herself as a qualified candidate for public office translates into a greater likelihood of envisioning oneself climbing the political career ladder in the future. Among respondents who express interest in seeking office, those who currently deem themselves highly qualified to run are 42 percentage points more likely than those who do not self-assess this way to voice interest in eventually seeking a high-level position (see Figure 3). Any systematic biases or distortions in self-perceived qualifications affect who ultimately enters a political contest.

Although “strategic” considerations influence nascent ambition, it is also important to note that our gauge of qualifications is a perceptual indicator that does not focus on a particular seat or political contest. At the nascent ambition phase of the candidate emergence process, potential candidates’ abstract notions of themselves as candidates, in general, and not as election competitors or victors, in particular, affect whether they consider running for office. Structural variables that affect the decision to enter specific races do not yield statistically significant effects in predicting nascent ambition, nor do gauges of the local or statewide political opportunity structure.

<sup>15</sup>Our analysis holds all continuous independent variables not under consideration at their overall sample means and all dummy variables not under consideration at their overall sample modes. The professional subsample in this case is attorneys. Although the substantive impact of strategic considerations is consistent across professions, the baseline from which the probabilities are generated differs.

This may not be entirely surprising in the first equation. After all, the majority of individuals who considered running for office expressed interest in local offices. We do not have gauges of the partisan composition of local constituencies, or information pertaining to the size and levels of incumbency associated with local offices, such as school board and city council. Thus, it is certainly possible that local structural variables exert an impact on nascent ambition. The total number of local governmental units by state, however—which serves as the one local structural variable included in the analysis—is statistically insignificant. Further, if state-level structural and contextual variables played an important role affecting nascent ambition, then their influence should be evident, to some extent, in the second equation. Yet the data indicate that state-level measures of political culture, legislative professionalization, and party congruence with the legislature and/or congressional delegation do not affect a respondent's likelihood of expressing a general interest in a statewide or congressional position.

Coupled with the statistically insignificant coefficient on perceived likelihood of winning the first race, the structural variables' insignificance bolsters the notion that nascent ambition precedes expressive ambition and is influenced by personal predispositions and traits that are relatively far removed from the political opportunity structure. More abstract indicators of political interest and efficacy appear to trigger the general notion of running for office, at which point structural variables can begin to play a role generating interest in entering specific contests. Because strategic considerations are driven primarily by internal factors, these findings suggest that changes in electoral conditions or election laws will have little effect on potential candidates' attitudes about entering politics.

### The Lasting Imprint of a Politicized Upbringing

Most of the members of the sample exist in the top tier of professional accomplishment and, in many cases, highly political environments. Yet early political exposure generates lasting effects that are independent and cannot be entirely compensated for by being politically active as an adult. In fact, a politicized upbringing is the third most important predictor of considering a candidacy; respondents who were raised in homes where politics were frequently discussed, and who ran for office as students, are much more likely to possess nascent political ambition as adults. Even among those members of the sample who express the utmost levels of political interest now, growing up in a household where politics were discussed and running for office was encouraged boosts the likelihood of considering a candidacy by 17 percentage points.

Experience running in a high school or college student body election increases the likelihood by an additional 7 percentage points. The effect size is even greater for respondents who express only "average" levels of political interest (see Figure 2). Individuals who participated in high school or college elections are 19% (9 percentage points) more likely than those who never ran in school elections to express interest in high-level positions (see Figure 3).

Moreover, politicized upbringings affect perceptions of qualifications to run for office. Respondents whose parents encouraged them to run for office are twice as likely as those whose parents offered no such support to consider themselves "very qualified" to run for office (24%, compared to 12%; difference significant at  $p < .01$ ). Alternatively, 29% of potential candidates who did not receive the suggestion to run for office from their parents consider themselves "not at all qualified" to seek public office, whereas only 9% of individuals who received political encouragement when growing up assess this way.<sup>16</sup>

The role of a politicized upbringing in the development of nascent political ambition suggests that specific experiences that might seem far removed from the decision to enter electoral politics do, in fact, influence the likelihood of considering a candidacy. Although we anticipated that exposure to campaigns as students would heighten nascent ambition in adults, the magnitude of the effect of these preprofessional experiences is striking. Because politicized upbringings do not fall within the rubric of political opportunity structures, studies of expressive ambition tend to overlook their impact.

### Minority Status and Exclusivity in the Candidate Emergence Process

Our regression analyses also reveal a portrait of a candidate-emergence process that is far from fully inclusive of all members of the candidate eligibility pool. Despite the fact that women and members of racial minority groups are now succeeding in professions that had long been closed to them, the highly accomplished women and blacks in our sample are significantly less likely ever to have considered running for office. The "average" female respondent, for instance, has a 0.49 predicted probability of having considered a run for office; an identical man has a 0.62 likelihood of having thought about a candidacy. In terms of race, "average" black male and female respondents are 15 percentage points less likely than their similarly situated white counterparts to have considered running for office. Put somewhat differently, a white male

<sup>16</sup>Although several of the explanatory variables in our models are correlated with one another, in no case is multicollinearity a problem.

respondent who self-assesses as “highly qualified” to run for office and “very likely” to win a race is approximately one-third more likely than a black woman with the same self-perceptions to have considered running for office.

Women and blacks are less likely to have considered running for office and, as a result, are less likely to reach the point where they can even express an office-specific interest. Sex, however, plays an additional role when we turn to the willingness to climb the political career ladder. Whereas the “average” male respondent who has considered running has a 0.55 probability of being open to seeking a federal or statewide elective position at some point in the future, the “average” female respondent’s likelihood is 0.34.<sup>17</sup> Even among those who identified themselves as “highly qualified” to run for office, there remains a 32% gender gap in eventual interest in a high-level position.

Finally, it is important to recognize that women and blacks are not only less politically ambitious in the general sense, but they are also more likely to lack the key ingredients that foster ambition. Fifty-seven percent of men, compared to only 36% of women, self-assess as “qualified” or “very qualified” to run for office (difference significant at  $p < .01$ ). Women are more than twice as likely as men to consider themselves “not at all qualified” to run for office (29% of women, compared to 14% of men). And in terms of political socialization, blacks are approximately 17% less likely than whites to indicate that, as children, they received encouragement from their parents to enter politics. Women are roughly 22% less likely than men to report parental encouragement for a candidacy.<sup>18</sup>

## Discussion and Conclusion

The study of political ambition has largely been limited to the decision making of political actors who are already fully immersed in electoral politics. The method-

<sup>17</sup>Women and blacks are also significantly more likely to state that their initial entrance into politics would be at the local level, as are individuals with more family responsibilities (married and have children who live at home). Somewhat surprisingly, these effects are no greater for women than men.

<sup>18</sup>Linked to concerns about the inclusiveness of the candidate emergence process, we call attention to the results of the competitive traits expectation. Household income significantly affects considering a candidacy, as well as the level of office on which members of the sample focus their interest. Higher incomes might confer greater financial freedom to consider running for office, but the opportunity costs associated with a candidacy are much higher. For the 31% of the respondents with household incomes that exceed \$200,000, a run for political office represents a very costly endeavor, at least in terms of trade-offs. But among those respondents willing to absorb the opportunity costs, higher incomes increase the probability of expressing interest in high-level positions. Individuals with a lower degree of material success do not perceive all levels of government as open to them.

ological challenges involved in identifying and sampling a broad cross-section of potential candidates have deterred political scientists from investigating the critically important initial decision to run for office. Our “eligibility pool approach” allows for the first broad empirical examination of the factors that lead to individuals’ initial considerations of a candidacy. The results culminate to substantiate empirically the theoretical distinction between nascent and expressive political ambition. Our findings also raise concerns about political representation and democratic legitimacy that examinations of expressive ambition overlook.

Studies that focus on the expressive ambition involved in entering state legislative or congressional races do not account for the substantial winnowing process that occurs in the candidate emergence process long before potential candidates decide to run for particular offices at particular times. Yet our data indicate that race, gender, and a sense of efficacy as a candidate play critical roles, independently and in concert with one another, in predicting whether potential candidates will even reach the political opportunity structures central to expressive ambition. Further, focusing on expressive ambition does not allow us to identify the strong role that early political socialization plays in the decision to run for office. To bypass nascent ambition, therefore, is to leave a critical void in our understanding of who comes to control the reins of all levels of government.

When we consider the broader implications of this “winnowing process,” our results speak to fundamental questions of political representation and democratic legitimacy. As we indicated at the outset of this analysis, the willingness of a large and diverse group of citizens to seek elective office is necessary for a healthy democracy. More specifically, in terms of substantive representation, women’s presence in high-level elective office decreases the possibility that gender-salient issues will be overlooked (e.g., Dodson 1998; Swers 2002). In a similar vein, black and Latino representatives are most likely to represent the issue preferences of black and Latino constituents (e.g., Canon 1999). On a more abstract level, the presence of traditionally marginalized groups in positions of political power conveys the political system’s level of inclusiveness. In the case of gender, Burrell captures the argument well:

Women in public office stand as symbols for other women, both enhancing their identification with the system and their ability to have influence within it. This subjective sense of being involved and heard for women, in general, alone makes the election of women to public office important because, for so many years, they were excluded from power. (1996, 151)

A similar logic applies in cases of race (e.g., Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gay 2002) and ethnicity (Pantoja and Segura 2003).

The results of our investigation indicate that, despite policy-related and symbolic benefits, the prospects for increasing women and racial minorities' numeric representation in our political institutions are not promising. Women and blacks are substantially less likely to express political aspirations, and women are much less likely to express interest in holding high-level office. In reality, the situation is likely far worse than our findings indicate. Our sample of potential candidates approximates the race and gender breakdowns in society. In terms of the pipeline

professions that lead to a career in politics, though, white males continue to dominate disproportionately, especially in the fields of law and business. Thus, many members of traditionally marginalized groups will likely remain severely underrepresented.

Certainly, future work is needed to flesh out more thoroughly the role of nascent ambition in the candidate emergence process. But the establishment of this distinct stage of political ambition will allow scholars to identify more clearly the specific barriers to citizens' full inclusion in electoral politics. Nascent political ambition must continue to be employed as a crucial barometer for gauging democratic legitimacy in the United States.

## APPENDIX Variable Description\*

Variable	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coding
DEPENDENT VARIABLES				
Ever Considered Running for Office	0, 1	.47	.46	Indicates whether respondent ever considered running for local, state, or national level office (1) or not (0).
<i>Interested in High-Level Office</i>	0, 1	.37	.48	<i>Indicates whether respondent would ever consider running for federal or statewide office (1) or not (0).</i>
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES – STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS				
Self-Perceived Qualifications to Hold Office	1–4	2.52 2.55	1.03 .95	Indicates respondent's level of self-perceived qualifications for holding elective office. Ranges from "not at all qualified" (1) to "very qualified" (4).
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES – POLITICAL INTEREST AND IDEOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONS				
Issue Passion	0–6	1.99 1.92	1.44 1.42	Indicates number of the following issues respondent feels strongly about and that could spur political activism (apart from running for public office): taxes, guns/crime, health care, abortion, foreign policy/terrorism, civil rights.
Political Interest	2–8	5.53 5.56	1.44 1.59	Indicates how closely respondent follows local and national news. Ranges from not closely (2) to very closely (8).
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES – MINORITY STATUS				
Woman	0, 1	.47 .45	.50 .50	Indicates whether respondent is a woman (1) or a man (0).
Black	0, 1	.09 .08	.29 .28	Indicates whether respondent is African American (1) or not (0).
Latino/a	0, 1	.05 .05	.22 .22	Indicates whether respondent is Latino/a (1) or not (0).

(continued on next page)

## APPENDIX (continued)

Variable	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coding
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES – POLITICIZED UPBRINGING				
Family Socialization	2–8	3.77 3.80	1.06 1.05	Indicates “how frequently [respondent] discussed politics with parents when growing up” and “how often parents encouraged [him/her] to run for office someday.” Higher numbers indicate a greater degree of family socialization.
Parent(s) Ran for Office	0, 1	.14 .15	.35 .36	Indicates whether either of the respondent’s parents ever ran for office (1) or not (0).
Ran for Office in School	0, 1	.55 .58	.50 .49	Indicates whether respondent ran for office as a student (1) or not (0).
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES – COMPETITIVE TRAITS				
Career Ambition	1–4	2.85 2.85	.77 .75	Indicates importance of rising to the top of profession. Ranges from “not at all important” (1) to “very important” (4).
Material Ambition	1–4	2.53 2.49	.71 .68	Indicates importance of earning a lot of money. Ranges from “not at all important” (1) to “very important” (4).
Current Income	1–6	4.58 4.51	1.21 1.22	Indicates respondent’s annual household income. Ranges from under \$25,000 (1) to more than \$200,000 (6).
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES – STAGE IN LIFE				
Married	0, 1	.75 .75	.44 .43	Indicates whether respondent is married (1) or not (0).
Children Living at Home	0, 1	.44 .48	.50 .50	Indicates whether respondent has children living at home (1) or not (0).
Age	22–85	48.47 46.87	11.02 10.76	Indicates respondent’s age.
STRUCTURAL / CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES				
Self-Perceived Likelihood of Winning	1–4	2.16 2.22	.86 .82	Indicates respondent’s self-perceived likelihood of winning the first office sought. Ranges from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (4).
Gore Vote in 2000	28.3–90.5	50.65 50.43	8.78 8.73	Indicates the proportion of the vote share Al Gore won in the state in the 2000 presidential election.
Term Limits	0, 1	.30 .30	.46 .46	Indicates whether the state has term limits for members serving in the state legislature (1) or not (0).
Part-Time Legislature	0, 1	.29 .29	.45 .45	Indicates whether the state legislature is part time (0) or full time (1).
Legislative Salary	0–99,000	36,848.8	29,343.62	Indicates the salary earned by members of the state legislature.

(continued on next page)

## APPENDIX (continued)

Variable	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coding
State Political Opportunity Structure	2.31–212	20.84 <i>20.93</i>	29.15 <i>27.11</i>	Indicates the total number of seats in the state legislature divided by the size of the congressional delegation (which serves as a proxy for state population).
Local Political Opportunity Structure	10–2,759	220.59 <i>224.77</i>	256.04 <i>263.32</i>	Indicates the Census Bureau's count of the total number of "government units" in the state, as of 1997, divided by the size of the congressional delegation.
Seats in Congressional Delegation	1–52	17.20 <i>16.45</i>	14.68 <i>14.34</i>	Indicates the total number of seats in the state's congressional delegation.
Party Congruence with State Legislature	0, 1	.78 <i>.77</i>	.41 <i>.42</i>	Indicates party congruence between the respondent and state legislature. Democrats with Democratic or "Mixed" state legislatures, Republicans with Republican or "Mixed" state legislatures, and Independents coded 1. Everyone else coded 0. <sup>†</sup>
Party Congruence with House Delegation	0, 1	.67 <i>.67</i>	.47 <i>.47</i>	Indicates party congruence between the respondent and the congressional delegation.
CONTROLS				
Democrat	0, 1	.45 <i>.46</i>	.50 <i>.50</i>	Indicates whether respondent is a Democrat (1) or not (0).
Republican	0, 1	.30 <i>.29</i>	.46 <i>.46</i>	Indicates whether respondent is a Republican (1) or not (0).
Political Involvement	0–9	5.49 <i>5.54</i>	2.31 <i>2.20</i>	Indicates level of respondent's political participation (over the course of the last year) based on the following activities: voted, contacted an elected official, joined or paid dues to an interest group, wrote a letter to a newspaper, contributed money to a campaign, volunteered for a candidate, volunteered on a community project, attended a political meeting, served on the board of a nonprofit organization. Lower numbers indicate lower levels of political engagement.
Received Suggestion to Run from "Political Source"	0, 1	.38 <i>.37</i>	.48 <i>.48</i>	Indicates whether respondent ever received the suggestion to run for office from a party leader, elected official, or community activist (1) or not (0).

\*Regular type indicates the means and standard deviations of the variables when referring to the entire sample (analyzed to determine the likelihood of considering a run for political office). Italics indicate the means and standard deviations of the variables of the subsample of respondents who considered running for political office (analyzed to determine the likelihood of expressing interest in high-level office).

<sup>†</sup>The results do not change when we code Democrats with Democratic legislatures and Republicans with Republican legislatures as congruent and everyone else 0. The same is true for the congressional delegation congruence variable.

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