

# The role of a gendered policy agenda in closing the mayoral ambition gap: The case of Texas female city council members

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## Abstract

This study explores female city council member political ambition to run for mayor. Women who hold mayoral office are potentially more competitive for higher elected office at the state and federal level. This study is based on a survey sent to Texas city council members in cities over 30,000. Forty-one percent of respondents said they would most likely run for mayor at some point, and we do find a gender gap in ambition (50% of men and 36% of women). However, we find that women who advocated a gendered local government political agenda exhibited higher levels of political ambition compared women who do not, and the ambition gap is reduced significantly. This finding holds up, controlling for other factors suggested by the literature that are predictors of political ambition. Two of these other factors—age and personal support—also increase city council member mayoral ambition. The findings are discussed in terms of strategies to increase female mayoral ambition.

## Keywords

political science, women's studies, sociology, political ambition, gender, local government

The underrepresentation of women in the United States occurs at the national, state, and local levels of government. Addressing the representational gender gap has received much attention from scholars as well as groups intent on reversing this unfortunate fact. Women's organizations—notably EMILY's List, WISH List, and more recently, Project GROW—have provided assistance to increase female representation at the state and national level, and have been successful to some extent. Women also receive support from a growing number of nonprofit organizations whose mission is to empower women and increase

representation through education, leadership training, and networking. However, the barriers women face when considering running for office appear to overwhelm these supportive efforts.

Political ambition is enhanced by past success and having the ability to represent an image of experience and authority. Accordingly, this article posits that one way to address representation gaps at the federal and state levels is to increase the number of female mayors. Women who serve as mayor have demonstrated executive leadership qualities and experience that make them potentially more competitive for higher office.

However, of the 1,351 mayors of U.S. cities with populations over 30,000 in 2014, only 18.4% were women (CAWP, 2013). The purpose of this study is to explore some of the factors that influence female city council member ambition to run for mayor.

Political ambition, specifically the decision to run for office, may be viewed as a strategic response to a political opportunity structure (Schlesinger, 1966). A function of an individual's personal attributes, personalities, and motivations (Fishel, 1971), political ambition consists of two stages or forms: nascent and expressive. Nascent ambition is a potential interest in seeking office and precedes expressive ambition, the actual act of deciding to run for office (Fox & Lawless, 2012, p. 5). Most of the factors involving nascent ambition are psychological, social, and personal. Strategic considerations such as term limits, electoral structure, and the possibility of electoral success are discrete factors that influence candidate ambition (Black, 1972). Ideology and a desire to change public policy are intangibles that often serve as powerful catalysts driving political participation (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001). Growing up in a political family (Flanigan & Zingale, 2002), having the support of political mentors (Wobrecht & Campbell, 2007) and community organizations (Costantini, 1990), as well as overall social interactions (McClurg, 2003) help cultivate individual political ambition.

Existing research and previous studies of these explanatory variables informed the creation of a survey administered to city council members in Texas cities over 30,000. This study finds that a female city council member's policy priorities are an important predictor of mayoral ambition. In addition to holding gendered policy priorities, perceived levels of personal support predict higher levels of political ambition. These

factors close the mayoral ambition gap. Female elected officials should be encouraged to pursue a gendered policy agenda. Such an approach contributes to enhanced ambition and, when framed strategically, resonates positively among voters and results in women holding a higher percentage of mayoral offices.

## Literature Review

This study focuses on the political ambition of female city council members—a generally understudied group. The political ambition of city council women to run for mayor is also relevant because the position of mayor often serves as a stepping-stone to higher-level political positions (McGlen et al., 2011). In order to increase the percentage of women holding statewide office and in-state legislatures and Congress, more women are needed in the “pipeline.” Women gain experience and hone their skills in local level offices that are more within reach in terms of time and money. The literature on political ambition is adapted to the case of city council members in the remainder of this section and hypotheses are proposed.

### » Attitudes and Issues

Some women are motivated to run for office by the desire to increase awareness of policy issues neglected by male candidates and elected officials. *Gendered public policy priorities* emerge in part due to personal experience with a problem or policy matter and efforts to initiate change or improvement (Kathlene, 1989, p. 412). The policy issues that often motivate women to become politically active are traditionally viewed as “women's issues,” including: education, health care, environment, consumer protection, helping under-served populations, and

equal rights (Brown, Heighberger, & Shocket, 1993). The desire to change public policy plays a considerably larger role in the decision of women to run for office compared to men. Specifically, women mayors more often rated their concern over specific policy issues as most important in their decision to seek their first municipal office and were more likely than men to have specific policy concerns (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2010).

A campaign focused on traditional “women’s issues” targeted at women voters has produced electoral successes for female candidates (Herrndon et al., 2003). Female candidates provide a level of assurance to many female voters that their interests are represented. While men could arguably represent the interests of women, female legislators introduce and vote for legislation that positively affects women and families more often than male legislators (Thomas, 1990). Controlling for party, women legislators also engage in more intense and frequent legislative action reflecting women’s experiences and concerns (Swers, 2002). As a result, female candidates can benefit by running “as women” and calling attention to their unique qualities and interests (Stokes-Brown et al., 2008). The role these dynamics play in the nonpartisan local government context where attention to “women’s issues” is less common is not clear. To the extent that having a woman on the ballot attracts the attention of more female voters and increases political participation among women (Herrndon et al., 2003) suggests that women candidates help to mobilize women voters at the local level.

Gendered policy priorities are particularly relevant and important at the local level of government. However, while the connection between gendered political views and ambition has been examined at other levels of government, less attention has been paid

to local government. There are several reasons for this lower level of attention. First, local elections are often nonpartisan and have very low levels of voter turnout, thereby reducing the visibility of these offices. In addition, in many cities, the council-manager form of government used in most cities reduces the influence of the mayor and city council and vests more power in the hands of the city manager, reducing the perceived relevance of city council members. Finally, some urbanists have observed that local governments have a “unitary interest” in economic growth and therefore are more likely to prefer “apolitical” developmental and allocational policies over redistributive policies that are believed to undermine economic growth (Peterson, 1981; Longoria, 1994).

Gender-role attitudes, as a dimension of political culture, play an important role in the decision of a woman to consider running for mayor. Political culture, defined as “the particular pattern of orientation to political action in which each political system is embedded” (Elazar, 1966, p. 78), is at least as important as the electoral system in predicting the presence and percentage of women city council members and mayors (Smith et al., 2012, p. 315). For example, states with a tradition of gender equity are much more likely to see women succeed in elections (Windett, 2011) and have a higher percentage of women in the legislature (Arceneaux, 2001). Just like states, there are local-level differences in gender-role attitudes. In some localities, voters and elites have been socialized to view politics as a man’s world (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2009; Sapiro, 1983), whereas in other communities this is not the case. For these reasons, *past female electoral success* is a potential indicator of a favorable political culture where voters have experienced women as capable political executives, and are more likely to support women can-

didates in the future. Based on the literature review above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Advocating gendered policy issues is associated with greater mayoral ambition.

H2: Serving as a city council member in a city with a previously elected woman mayor is associated with greater mayoral ambition.

### » Institutional Characteristics and Outcomes

The “attractiveness” of the office of mayor may influence a female city council member’s desire to run for mayor. While women have differing views on various issues, women tend to prefer a style of politics that focuses on people and solving problems cooperatively while avoiding political conflict (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014, p. 19). The nature of the office of mayor varies depending on a city’s form of government. For example, the office of mayor is much more politicized in the mayor-council form of government compared to the council-manager form of government. The role of a mayor in the *council-manager form of government* emphasizes ceremonial tasks such as representing the city at dinners and special events, serving as the presiding officer at meetings and acting as the spokesman for the council. Serving as representative and spokesperson, the mayor becomes an important channel for citizen input (Svara, 1987). It is the city council in a council-manager form of government that adopts the city budget, identifies policy priorities, sets the local tax rate, and leaves administration to a professional city manager. Local government is generally depoliticized in a council-manager form of government. In contrast, the office of mayor in a mayor-council local government is more politicized. The mayor in a mayor-council form of government must deal with more

political wrangling and try to pacify various political constituencies inside and outside of city hall (DeNardis & Rodriguez, 2007). Because women are more likely to identify themselves as “public servants” rather than “politicians” (Ford, 2010, p. 142; Flaming, 1984), female city council members may have more ambition to run for mayor in cities with the council-manager form of government.

Female city council members who have won their seats in *at-large (city-wide) elections* have demonstrated that they can win a city-wide office and have a chance to win the mayor’s office, which is also elected citywide. In contrast, a female city council member that represents a single-member district has a smaller constituency and has likely built a record focusing on district issues rather than city-wide issues that might give focus to a mayoral campaign. Thus, holding an at-large city council seat bolsters self-assurance, potentially narrows the gender “confidence-gap” (Fox & Lawless, 2012, p. 10), and may enhance mayoral ambition. At-large election victories help to change attitudes of citizens in general, and encourage women to participate politically, and run for office. Based on the literature review above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Serving as a city council member with a council-manager form of government is associated with greater mayoral ambition

H4: Serving as a city council member elected to an at-large seat is associated with greater mayoral ambition.

### » Personal Support

In the not-so-distant past, a woman did not seek elected office because politics were viewed as “dirty” and not an “appropriate” public venue for women (Hedlund et al., 1979). While attitudes have changed, to this

day one of the leading factors hindering gender parity in elective office is the fact that women are much less likely than men (60% less) to see themselves as “very qualified” to run for office (Fox & Lawless, 2011). Women are also less likely than men to think they will win their first campaign (Fox & Lawless, 2011). Since an overwhelming majority of potential candidates do not run for office unless they believe they can win, lower self-assessment scores of women directly affect representation levels (Fox & Lawless, 2011). Support from family, friends, political organizations, and civic groups can help boost confidence and nurture a candidate’s “inclination to consider a candidacy” (Fox & Lawless, 2005).

Women are not traditionally socialized to take an active role in politics (McGlen et al., 2011), and they face the challenge of overcoming gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes. Because of these barriers, *perceived personal support* is essential to increasing the number of women mayoral candidates. For example, coming from a “political family” increases candidate motivations to run for office. Women who are raised in a family environment where involvement in politics is considered routine are more likely to perceive themselves as viable candidates to run for office (Fox & Lawless, 2005). Friends and family can play an equally influential role. In a study of state legislators, the most influential source of personal encouragement for women was their spouse or partner. Married (or living as married) female legislators were also significantly more likely than men to say their spouse was “very supportive” of their position in office (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2009, p. 12). Female political mentors are especially helpful to newcomers experiencing campaign challenges for the first time. Female candidates running for a seat in the United States House of Represen-

tatives were more likely than men to consult with a (female) political mentor when considering running for office (Padgett-Owen, 2010). Women candidates who referenced support and advice of a female mentor reportedly perceived their own performance and likelihood of winning an election in a more positive light (Latu et al., 2013).

Based on the literature review above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: A city council member’s perceived level of personal support is associated with mayoral ambition.

## » Data and Methods

This study examines the mayoral ambition of city council members in Texas using online survey research. Texas is a useful research site for a number of reasons. First, the percentage of female mayors in Texas (16.8%) is below, but close to, the national average (18.4%). The state includes many large cities, suburbs, and rural communities where the political and social contexts vary within the broader context of a conservative political environment. The pathway to advancement for women in this politically and socially conservative state deserves special attention in an attempt to better understand the factors that contribute to greater female representation in Texas and across the country. In addition, Texas has an interesting political history with respect to women. Women in Texas have served as governor, including Ma Ferguson in the 1920s and the very celebrated Ann Richards in the 1990s. Other nationally visible Texas women in politics include Oveta Culp Hobby, Barbara Jordan, and Lady Bird Johnson among many others.

The election pitting Ann Richards against Clayton Williams highlighted the clash of the traditional patriarchal culture



and how women can confront it with *élan* (Tolleson-Rinehart & Stanley, 1994). Ann Richards looms large as a role model for many women in politics. She used her quick wit and toughness to govern effectively as a liberal in a conservative state, and led passage of education finance reform, prison reform, and gun regulation. Despite stereotypes that Texas is anti-woman and anti-feminist, there are currently eight women serving as mayor in the 64 Texas cities larger than 50,000, including Betsy Price (Fort Worth), Ivy Taylor (San Antonio), Nelda Martinez (Corpus Christi), Beth Van Duyne (Irving), Becky Ames (Beaumont), Deloris Prince (Port Arthur), Linda Martin (Euless). Notably Mayor Anise Parker (Houston), is one of the few openly gay mayors of a major U.S. city. However, it is important to note that while strides are being made, women hold only 12.5% of the mayor's offices in Texas cities with populations exceeding 50,000.

To examine mayoral ambition among Texas city council members, 323 city council members serving in Texas cities with a population exceeding 30,000 (U.S. Census, 2013) were sent an online survey. The names and email addresses of city council members were obtained from local government websites. The survey was conducted in two waves. In order to maximize female participation, an initial survey was sent, and frequent reminders were made to encourage responses. The remaining list of city council members received the online survey, and two email reminders were sent to obtain a sample of men. None of the respondents knew the purpose of the study or of focus on mayoral ambition. The descriptive statistics for the sample are summarized in Table 1.

Of the 323 council members who received the survey, 82 returned the survey resulting in a response rate of 24%. Forty-three percent of respondents represent

**Table 1**  
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Min	Max	Mean <sup>a</sup>	SD
Mayoral Ambition	0	1	41	
Female	0	1	63	
Gendered Policy Agenda	0	1	48	
Former Female Mayor	0	1	64	
Mayor-Council Government	0	1	17	
Hold Single Member Seat	0	1	45	
Personal Support Index	12	20	17.5	1.96
Age	1	6	3.68	1.22
Married	0	1	81	
College Degree	0	1	69	
No children in Home	0	1	79	
N	82			

<sup>a</sup>Values for dichotomous variables are percentages; the modal category for age is 4 (55 to 65)

communities in North Texas, 23% represent communities in East Texas, 17% represent communities in Central Texas, 10% represent communities in West Texas, and seven percent represent communities in South Texas. Sixty percent of respondents represent suburban communities, four percent of respondents represent rural communities, and 36% represent urban areas including major cities in their own metropolitan statistical areas. Respondents under the age of 44 comprise 17% of the sample, over half (55%) of the respondents are age 45-64, and 28% are older than 65. Eighty-one percent of respondents are married. A majority of respondents (69.2%) are college graduates. Age is operationalized as an ordinal variable due to question wording used to maximize the response rate. The majority of respondents (79%) had no children under the age of 16 living in their household.

The dependent variable in this study is mayoral ambition measured by the question: "Please select the statement that you most closely agree with," and the following response categories: "I will most likely not run for mayor" and "I will most likely run for mayor." In the case of the latter option, future time frames were provided: one to four years, five to 10 years, and 11 to 15 years. All respondents indicating an interest in running for mayor at some point in less than 15 years were collapsed into a single category. Forty-one percent of council members indicated that they may run for mayor at some point. There is clearly a mayoral ambition gap as 50 of men have mayoral ambition compared to 36% of women (Chi Square = 1.52; sig. = .16).

The independent variables in this study are questions measuring respondent attitudes and institutional characteristics of each respondent's city. Advocating a gendered policy agenda is operationalized using the open-ended responses to the following question: Please list your top three policy priority areas. We consider both the literature on local government policy and women and politics to code the responses. Responses that focused on "traditional" local government issues—also known as developmental and allocational policies (Peterson, 1981)—such as taxes, economic development, protective services, and infrastructure were coded 0. Responses that focused on redistributive issues (Peterson, 1981), such as housing, education, environment, health and poverty, were considered gendered policy issues and coded 1. In addition, self-reported policy priorities to improve collaboration and cooperation were coded 1 given the relative emphasis women place on collaboration and cooperation compared to men. The categorization of policy issues described above coincides with policy issues considered to be

"women's issues" that emphasize and address the needs of women and their families, such as healthcare, education, and safe living conditions for children (Swers & Larson, 2005). Based on this coding, 48% of respondents expressed at least one gendered policy priority.

Gender-role attitudes favorable to electing a woman mayor are operationalized with the question: "Has a woman ever served as mayor in your city?" Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated that there had been at least one woman elected mayor in the past (coded 1). While this number may seem high, recall that the question asks if a woman served as mayor at any point in the past. The actual percentage of women currently serving as mayor in Texas cities is 16.8%.

In order to determine the type of seat the female city council member represents, respondents were asked the following question: "Do you represent an at-large seat, or a single-member district?" Forty-five percent of women hold a single member district seat. Form of Government was determined using the following question: "What is the form of government in your city?" Based on this question, 17% of women served in a mayor-council city. This finding is not surprising given that 15% of home-rule Texas cities use the mayor-council form of government (Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/moc02>).

Perceived personal support is operationalized using a four-question additive index. Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) their level of agreement with the statements listed. The four questions include: (1) My spouse/partner supports my political career; (2) My immediate family supports my political career; (3) My extended family supports my political career; and

(4) I have effective, meaningful mentoring relationships who support me and my political career. The mean index score is 17.5 (Std. Dev. = 1.96) and the range is 12 to 20. If the respondent indicates having a spouse or partner, the spousal support variable was coded 0.

## Findings

Table 2 presents two logistic regressions. In the first column, we regress gender, advocacy of gendered policy agenda, and the interaction between these two variables. In the interaction term, the women who also advocate a gendered policy agenda are contrasted with women who do not and the men in the sample. The model successfully predicts 63% of the cases. The model Chi-Square is statistically significant (Chi Square = 8.62; sig. = .03), and the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test (Chi Square = .0001; Sig. = .99) is not statistically significant, indicating that the model is a good fit for the data.

As noted above, women are less likely to have mayoral ambition ( $b = -1.79$ ; sig. = .01). Having a gendered policy agenda has no impact on mayoral ambition for all respondents (male and female). It is noteworthy that the coefficient for a gendered policy agenda is in the negative direction, suggesting that candidates who are outside of the policy mainstream of developmental and allocational policies are less likely to have mayoral ambition ( $b = -.98$ ; sig. = .24). However, women who also have a gendered policy agenda are more likely to have mayoral ambition compared to women and men who do not ( $b = 2.49$ ; sig. = .02). The odds of a man having ambition to run for mayor are 33% higher than a woman having ambition to run for mayor ( $\text{Exp}(b)$  of the Constant = 1.33). However, the odds of a woman who

advocates a gendered policy agenda is 12% higher ( $\text{Exp}(b) = 12.00$ ). On the other hand, the odds that a woman who does not advocate a gendered policy agenda will have mayoral ambition is 17% lower ( $\text{Exp}(b) = .17$ ). Interestingly, the odds of men who advocate a gendered policy agenda also having mayoral ambition are 50% lower. There is clear and strong support for Hypothesis 1.

Interpreting odds ratios can be cumbersome. In order to clarify these findings, predicted probabilities were calculated. Figure 1 presents a summary of the findings in the Model 1 presented in Table 2 using predicted probabilities. The predicted probability of a male city council member having mayoral ambition is .57, or a 57% chance. On the other hand, men who advocated a gendered policy agenda at the local government level have a .33 predicted probability of having mayoral ambition. Women who do not advocate a gen-

**Table 2**  
Mayoral Ambition Logistic Regression Analysis

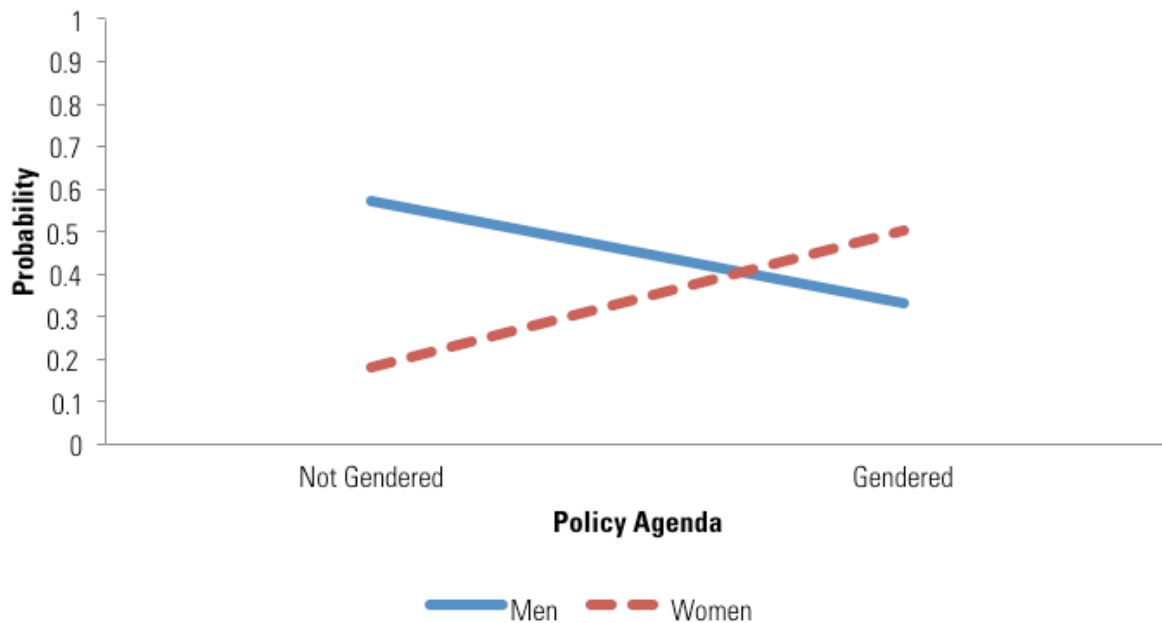
	Model 1		Model 2	
Variable	b	Exp(b)	b	Exp(b)
Gender (Female)	-1.79**	.17	-1.56*	.22
Gendered Policy Agenda	-.98	.38	-.59	.56
Gender*Gendered Agenda	2.49*	12.00	1.97+	7.20
Former Female Mayor			-.27	.76
Council Manager Govt.			.82	2.29
Hold At-Large Council Seat			-.60	.55
Personal Support Index			.30+	1.35
Age			-.51*	.60
Married			-.76	.47
College Degree			.14	1.15
No children in Home			-.18	.84
Constant	.29	1.33	-2.53	.08
% Cases Correctly Predicted	62.5		72.7	
Model Chi Square	8.62*		19.11*	
N = 80				

+ = <.10; \* = <.05; \*\* = <.01



**Figure 1**

Predicted Probabilities for Mayoral Ambition



dered policy agenda have a .18 predicted probability of having mayoral ambition. Women who have a gendered policy agenda have a .50 predicted probability of having mayoral ambition. In other words, holding a gendered policy agenda increases the probability of a woman having mayoral ambition by .32. Perhaps more notably from the standpoint of closing the ambition gap, women with a gendered policy agenda are only .07 less likely to have mayoral ambition than men who hold a non-gendered policy agenda. Having a gendered policy agenda closes the gap in mayoral ambition between men with a traditional agenda and women with a gendered agenda and increases ambition to levels greater than men with a gendered political agenda.

The second column in Table 2 presents the full model examining the five hypotheses introduced above and control variables (Model 2). In Model 2, we find that gender and the interaction term between gender and advocating a gendered policy agenda remain statistically significant, controlling for

attitudinal and institutional factors as well as individual-level characteristics. The model correctly predicts 74% of the cases, and the model is a good fit for the data (Model Chi Square = 19.98; sig. = .05; Hosmer and Lemeshow Test = 4.32; sig. = .83). There is support for Hypothesis 5, in that stronger perceived personal support for one's political career increases ambition ( $b = 1.06$ ; sig. = .06). We also find that age is statistically significant and in the expected direction, as older respondents tend to have less mayoral ambition ( $b = -.57$ ; sig. = .03). For each category increase in age, there is a decrease in the odds that the respondent has mayoral ambition ( $\text{Exp}(b) = .60$ ).

There is no support for the other proposed hypotheses. Women city council members serving in cities where no women have ever been elected mayor are not more likely to have mayoral ambition (Hypothesis 2 not supported). Perhaps, as suggested in the literature review, the fact that these cities have not elected a woman mayor in the past indi-

cates that the voters are not open to female leadership. However, this question alone is likely not a sufficient measure of a city's political culture and orientation toward woman leaders. In addition, Hypotheses 3 and 4 are not supported. The potentially politicized environment associated with mayor-council system does not either encourage or discourage ambition. Forms of government are converging in a number of ways that minimize the differences in politics and the ways that things get done in council-manager and mayor-council cities and where the difference between "traditional" cities and "reformed" cities are decreasing (see, for example, Frederickson, et al., 2003, p. 10). In other words, council-manager cities are becoming more "political," and mayor-council cities are also becoming more "professional" as cities adapt to the expectations of their residents. Hypothesis 4, that city council members elected at-large are more likely to have mayoral ambition, is not supported.

In order to facilitate understanding, a best-case scenario for female political ambition was calculated. A young woman with the maximum amount of personal support and a gendered policy agenda—setting other variables at values to enhance likelihood—has a .65 probability of having mayoral ambition. In comparison, a young man with the maximum amount of personal support and a non-gendered agenda—setting other variables at values to enhance likelihood—has a .69 probability of having mayoral ambition. A gendered policy agenda clearly closes the mayoral ambition gap.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the mayoral ambitions of women city council members in Texas cities. Gaining a better

understanding of political attitudes, institutional characteristics, and existing support for potential mayoral candidates will help to better inform the efforts and activities of organizations working to increase female representation at all levels of government. The mayoral ambition gender gap can be closed by focusing on younger women, enhancing personal support of family and mentors, and by encouraging women to advocate a gendered policy agenda.

Advocating a "women's agenda" focused on issues historically salient to women appears to be a stronger motivator than a gender-neutral political agenda that focuses on economic development and infrastructure investments. A gendered policy agenda may lead a woman to see herself as "qualified" and thereby increase mayoral ambition. Confidence of female city council members to actively seek the office of mayor is potentially enhanced when women successfully convey the importance of a gendered approach to local policy and how this benefits the entire community. A policy seen as developmental by one set of interests may be seen as redistributive by others (Stone, 2004) and vice versa. For example, education policy framed as a strategy to attract employers and thus boost economic development will likely promote engagement and support of business interests who might be otherwise be resistant to more "redistributive spending" (Stone, 2004).

Conservative groups—especially at the national level, but increasingly at the local level—recruit women to run for office and champion their traditional gender-role attitudes and conservative public policies. For example, "Feminists for Life" promotes the idea that abortion is "anti-woman," and the "Mama Bear movement" suggests that women should focus on national security and the economy to protect children from

foreign threats and economic insecurity. The rhetoric of conservative women's groups promotes an "anti-feminist identity," ostensibly to fuel the political ambition of conservative women. To date, conservative efforts to support women candidates in primaries and elections has had limited success in part because "female lawmakers on the state level tend to be more moderate [...] and even if they are as conservative, women candidates also tend to be less bombastic, making it tough to break through on a rhetorical level" (Newton-Small, 2014). Women running on issues championed traditionally by men may not be an effective strategy to increase female representation.

This study suggests that women should have confidence in a "gendered" policy agenda and not shy away from campaigning on the issues that are proven to make a difference in the quality of life, education, health, and well-being of families and communities. Nor should they feel that they have to move away from women's issues to get support. Encouraging women to campaign on a platform that perpetuates the status quo (i.e., *not* advocating policy issues that will change or enhance the quality of life for women, families, and communities) will not change "politics as usual" and does not appear to increase political ambition. This study's findings in the context of nonpartisan local politics in a conservative state such as Texas suggests the power of "feeling qualified," and those interested in enhancing female representation in executive and higher offices should enhance those feelings in local elected officials (such as female city council members) to increase the pool of qualified candidates for higher office.

It is important to note that efforts to increase mayoral ambition among city council members may not lead to their eventual election. Local government elections have

notoriously low turnout, and, as a result, the candidates who win the support of pro-growth and low-tax interests often—but not always—win at the local level. There is an additional complication that voters in Texas are more conservative, while the eligible voters that include many nonvoters are increasingly more liberal. A more gendered policy agenda may produce more successful electoral outcomes in the future. For example, a majority of Texans now support gay marriage, and a growing percentage of residents in urban areas acknowledge the need for sustainable development and smart growth. The fact that women have been elected to the position of mayor in many Texas cities suggests that women can and do win if they run. Identifying the right strategy and remaining committed to that strategy would likely produce more political ambition among women and increased female executive leadership in the long run. ■

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