

Who wants women to run? An investigation of gender differences in patterns of support among Irish local election candidates.

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Abstract

Interventions aimed at increasing women's numeric representation in politics tend to solve the problem by tackling a lack of demand among gatekeepers. However, even where there is an increase in demand, it is still important to consider what is happening on the supply-side; that is, the circumstances under which individuals will put themselves forward to run for office. One factor that has been identified as an important predictor of whether someone will choose to do so is whether they receive encouragement to run. This paper explores whether such encouragement is gendered. We investigate this question using a unique data set of candidates who ran in the 2019 Irish local elections. We find that female candidates received more encouragement to run than their male counterparts and that they were also more likely to receive such encouragement from particular sources (elected politicians, spouses, family members).

Key words

Local elections; Irish elections; party politics; gender and politics; women's representation

Introduction

The implementation of the candidate gender quota at Irish general elections under the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 clearly identifies political parties as important barriers to women's entry into political life. The measure effectively required that no less than thirty percent of candidates fielded at the 2016 general election be female¹, with parties subject to a loss of fifty percent of their state funding should they fail to comply. At the next general election, the threshold will rise from thirty to forty percent.

As a result of this measure, political parties need more female candidates, thus making space for women who are inclined to run for political office. It is fair to say, even after just two electoral cycles, that the quota has been successful; after it first came into effect, the share of women in Dáil Éireann increased from just over fifteen per cent to more than twenty-two per cent. While the quota is only in place at the national level, it has had a trickle-down effect to the local elections, with parties increasing the share of women running at the local level so that they can gain political experience and thus increase the pool of potential female party candidates at general elections in the future. However, such an intervention serves to tackle only part of the problem by making more space for women among party candidates but fails to guarantee that women will put themselves forward.

It is still important therefore to consider the circumstances under which women will make their decision to run for office. Norris (1993; 1997) has highlighted that the supply of

candidates is determined by the level of motivation of the individual as well as by their access to resources. Subsequent research has broadened this supply-side analysis by exploring what happens prior to individuals putting themselves forward, either by running as a candidate or by engaging in the candidate selection process for a political party. Here researchers have explored the *inclination* to stand as a candidate (i.e. nascent political ambition) which will precede the decision to run.

Work in this area has found evidence that a gender gap in nascent political ambition exists; that is, women are less likely to consider running for office than are men (Fox, Lawless & Feeley, 2001). This gap is present even among women who are just as qualified to run as their male counterparts (Fox & Lawless, 2010) and has been found to emerge at a young age, with female high school students being less likely to say that they would consider a career in politics than their male classmates (Fox & Lawless, 2014). While there are many explanations for why this gender gap emerges, one explanation is that women are less likely to receive encouragement to run from both political and non-political actors (Fox & Lawless, 2004).

This paper contributes to our understanding of the conditions under which women will run for office by investigating whether encouragement to run received by candidates is gendered in Ireland. We do this through the use of an original dataset, the *Local Election Candidate Study 2019*, a postal survey which gathers information on the background, activities and views of candidates in Irish local elections.

The paper proceeds with a review of the existing research on explanations for women's underrepresentation, before examining the importance of encouragement to run in determining whether women will put themselves forward. We derive two testable hypotheses based on this literature. We next describe the data that we use in order to test these propositions before presenting the results of our analysis. Finally, we conclude on the implications of our study.

Literature review and hypotheses

Despite making up approximately half of the world's population, women are underrepresented in politics. They make up just 25.3 percent of parliamentarians worldwide (IPU, 2022), with the situation looking even worse with respect to their representation in cabinet and among world leaders. This figure hides a significant amount of cross-country variation with the explanations for why this arises being similarly varied.

Norris' (1997) model of legislative recruitment, consisting of four levels of analysis, each nested within another, provides a means of thinking about these explanations in a systematic way. At the highest level of analysis, the political system sets the rules of the game, with candidate selection processes operating within it, and below that, the demands of gatekeepers and supply of aspirants interacting with one another to determine who is ultimately elected to parliament. At each stage, we can identify potential barriers to women's entry into political life.

In advanced industrial democracies, a great deal of attention has been paid to the demand side in general (Kenny, 2013). And political parties in particular are singled out as important potential barriers. As recruiters of legislative candidates, parties effectively act as gatekeepers to political life (Norris, 1993) that can either facilitate or block women's entry into

politics. Smaller parties, left-wing parties, parties with a centralized candidate selection process, and those political parties that contain women activists all tend to make more space for women on their tickets (Caul, 1999; 2001; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Galligan, 1993; Lovenduski, 1993; McGing, 2013). And where parties are not found to afford women such opportunities, it is possible to encourage them to do so through a range of interventions.

One such intervention is the introduction of a candidate gender quota. This intervention has been employed in the Irish context. In 2016, a quota came into effect for the first time at the general election. This measure explicitly identifies political parties themselves as barriers to women's entry into Irish political life and effectively forces them to make space for women who are assumed to want to run but to have been previously discouraged from doing so.

It has been effective in increasing the demand for female candidates by Irish political parties. First, it did so directly at the national level where parties are required by law to meet the quota in order to retain all of their state funding. After the 2011 election, women held just over 15 percent of the seats in Dáil Éireann; with this figure rising above 22 percent in the wake of the quota's introduction in 2016. But there was also an indirect effect at the local level; parties have used the local elections to run more female candidates so that they can gain experience prior to running for office at the national level.

In 2014, two years after the gender quota legislation was passed and before it came into effect at the general election, 24 percent of party candidates running for a political party were women. At the next local election, in 2019, women made up 29.69 percent of all candidates for the five main political parties.² As a result, we have seen an increase in women's representation in local government over the same period. In 2009, prior to the passage of the quota legislation, just 17 percent of councillors were women; after the 2019 local election, they constituted almost a quarter.

Making space for women is of course a crucial step in addressing their underrepresentation but focussing only on demand misses an important piece of the puzzle. It is important also to consider the issue of the supply-side of Norris' model. That is, we must think about whether we can assume that women will automatically come forward once demand for their candidacies has been increased.

Thinking about the supply-side is important for two reasons. First, it helps us to achieve a more complete understanding of the barriers to women's political representation in a given context. And, second, understanding what might encourage women to (or prevent them from) putting themselves forward can help parties to design interventions themselves that will help to attract quality women to run as candidates for them.

Existing research on the circumstances under which a woman will put herself forward as a candidate has focused on a range of factors such as access to resources like time and income, as well as the social networks which are provided by the so-called pipeline careers (Ballington & Matland, 2004; Mariani, 2008; Norris & Lovenduski, 1993; Oxley & Fox, 2004). In addition, traditional sex-role socialization has been found to orient women away from politics and create a psychological barrier to standing (Clark, 1991; Fox & Lawless, 2005; Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). More recent research has focused on additional factors such as personality traits (Allen & Cutts, 2020), while research exploring political ambition among

marginalised women has identified the importance of social networks and civic engagement for these women (Brown, 2014; Dowe, 2020; Scott et al., 2021).

Fox and Lawless (2004; 2010) have also highlighted that the decision to run for office is not made by the candidate in isolation. They found evidence that gendered patterns of encouragement to run for office helps to explain the gender gap in political ambition; with women being less likely to receive such encouragement to run (we return to this below).

In their work on nascent political ambition, Fox and Lawless (2004; 2010) consider a further factor that might help to explain the gender gap in political ambition: gendered patterns of encouragement to run for office. In analysing a cohort of individuals that make up the eligibility pool (i.e. those individuals that are best-placed to run for office without having already done so), Fox and Lawless (2010) find that not only are similarly qualified men more likely to be encouraged to run for office by political actors (an elected official, party official or party activist), they are also recruited more intensively; that is, they are encouraged to run for office with greater frequency than are women. And not only is encouragement to run gendered, there is evidence that receiving such encouragement from both political and non-political actors (a spouse, family-member, friend, or business colleague) predicts whether someone has considered running for office (Fox & Lawless, 2004). Further, not only does encouragement to run predict openness to considering becoming a candidate, it also predicts whether an individual has taken a concrete step towards doing so, for example, by discussing a potential run with possible donors or by finding out who to get on the ballot (Fox & Lawless, 2010). It also predicts whether an individual has ever sought elective office, though, in this case, only encouragement to run from a political actor was found to have a statistically significant effect here (Fox & Lawless, 2004).

Gendered patterns of encouragement to run thus have the potential to explain the circumstances under which women will (or will not) run for office and it is such gender differences that this paper is interested in investigating. However, in contrast with this previous work, we are interested in testing for gendered encouragement to run among those who have already run for office. By examining the pool of individuals who run, rather than those who are best-placed to run, we are able to draw inferences about whether such encouragement matters.

If women are less likely to be encouraged to run for office in the first instance, there are three possible implications for women who do choose run. First, it could be the case that the women who run are exceptional in that they receive comparatively less encouragement to run for office but will do so regardless. Second, it may be the case that the woman who run are those few women who receive encouragement to do so, though they receive the same amount of encouragement as their male counterparts. We don't find these two explanations to be very plausible. In fact, we argue that where a gender gap in political ambition exists, we should expect that an extra push is needed for women to overcome this and receiving more encouragement to run than their male counterparts might be one means of doing so.

By examining gendered effects among candidates, our findings will have implications for the so-called supply side explanations of women's underrepresentation without directly engaging with Norris' (1997) model. Some authors in the field, in particular, feminist institutionalists, have become increasingly critical of these demand and supply explanations, arguing that not enough attention is paid to the interaction between the two (i.e. the ways in which demand can shape supply and vice versa) but also that recognition of the way that the

candidate recruitment process is gendered must be central to any adequate explanation to gendered outcomes in political representation (Kenny, 2013). Indeed, Piscopo and Kenny (2020) argue that rather than continue to focus on explaining depressed political ambition among women, scholars should instead think about how candidate emergence is influenced by factors that are contextual, institutional, but also individual. While this paper is not directly testing an explanation for candidate emergence, we revisit some of these issues below.

This paper makes a contribution to the existing literature on women's underrepresentation by investigating whether encouragement to run for office in Ireland is gendered among individuals who have already run for office at least once. Specifically, we examine whether gender differences are evident in the encouragement to run received by local election candidates. In Ireland, holding local office is an important pipeline to national office (Weeks & Quinlivan, 2009; Reidy, 2011; Buckley et al., 2015), however, examining the local level is also inherently interesting given the important role of local government, particularly with respect to the provision of local services (Weeks & Quinlivan, 2009). We test two hypotheses related to our research question:

Hypothesis 1: women who run for election will have received more encouragement to run than their male counterparts.

Hypothesis 2: we will observe gendered patterns in sources of encouragement to run.

Previous research by Culhane (2017) on candidate selection in the Republic of Ireland, indicates that men are more likely to be perceived to be electable candidates and they are therefore more likely to receive informal encouragement to run from branch officials at the local level or at the national level. However, as was outlined above, we expect that women candidates will have received more encouragement to run (hypothesis 1).

Second, we expect that there will be gender differences with respect to the support that women do receive. Support may come from political or non-political sources and while the work discussed above does not disaggregate these sources (i.e. examine whether encouragement to run was derived from an elected politician or a party activist), we think it is important to do so.

In particular, we expect that women are more likely to require encouragement to run from their partner or spouse, as well as their broader family before they decide to mount a campaign. This is due to the fact that politics represents a very demanding occupation which gives rise to work-family conflict that has been found to be particularly acute for younger women in politics (Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2019). Folke and Rickne (2020) find that even in an egalitarian country like Sweden, promotion to demanding political roles (in their analysis, mayor or parliamentarian) increases the risk of divorce for women but not for similarly placed men. In fact, Fulton et al. (2016) argue that being a woman with children in the household appears to require women to be more strategic with respect to their decision to run for office. Overall, given the additional pressures that women appear to experience with respect to their intimate relationships and domestic responsibilities, women should require strong support from these sources before they will consider running for office. We expect then that women who run will be more likely to have received encouragement to do so from their spouse (or partner), as well as their family more broadly.

Data

To test these two hypotheses, this paper employs the 2019 wave of the *Local Election Candidate Study (LECS)*. This dataset is the result of a postal survey that has been designed and implemented by the authors. The survey was distributed to the entire population of candidates running in the May 2019 local elections in Ireland. It aims to gather information regarding their attitudes and experiences. In total, 1,965 questionnaires were distributed with 617 usable responses returned to the research team. This gives a response rate of 31.40 percent. The composition of the sample with respect to party identification, is fairly close to that of the underlying population (though it is worth noting that Independents and Sinn Féin candidates are underrepresented, while Green Party candidates are overrepresented). Of the 611 respondents who indicated their gender, 29.95 percent were female compared with 28.06 percent in the population. We can therefore be reasonably satisfied that our sample approximates the population from which it is drawn.

We employ one dependent variable to test hypothesis 1, related to level or intensity of encouragement to run, and a further seven dependent variables to test hypothesis 2, which relates to the sources from which candidates received encouragement to run.

For this second set of dependent variables, respondents were asked the following question: ‘Before you stood as a candidate for the first time, did any of the following individuals encourage you to run...?’ They were then presented with seven different categories, covering both political and non-political sources, and could indicate as many or as few as were appropriate. Six of the options were the following pre-set categories: an elected politician, a party activist, a friend, a family member, a spouse, and a work colleague. A seventh option was ‘other’ with a follow-up question asking the respondent to specify an additional source of support that was not presented as an existing option. The most popular response specified for this ‘other’ category was related to non-partisan activists in the community who had encouraged the candidate to run.

Candidates received a score of 1 if they indicated that they received support from a given source and a score of 0 otherwise. The scores across these seven dependent variables were then summed across candidates to create a variable that captures intensity of encouragement to run. This variable can take any value between 0 and 7, with 0 indicating that the candidate received no encouragement to run at all and 7 indicating that the respondent received encouragement to run from all seven of the sources listed.

The key independent variable for the multivariate analysis is gender. Respondents were asked to indicate their gender, having the option to choose between male, female, and other. Three of the 617 respondents failed to answer this question. A further three respondents selected the other category and have been recoded as missing values for the purposes of this analysis. The remaining respondents in the sample are composed of 428 men and 183 women.

In addition to this key independent variable, it is necessary to include a set of controls that we might expect to impact the level or source of encouragement received. In particular, candidates who chose to run as independents should be less likely to have received encouragement to run from an elected politician or party activist. However, we might also expect that patterns of encouragement to run might vary by party identification more generally. Therefore, we have included party affiliation of the candidate rather than employing a

party/non-party dummy variable. Candidates were coded into one of the following categories: Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, the Labour Party, Sinn Féin, the Green Party, Other Party (this includes the smaller parties like the Social Democrats), and Non-Party (those running as independents). For the purposes of the analysis, Fine Gael, as the then party of government, serves as the reference category against which these coefficients in the models should be interpreted.

As well as this party identification variable, we have included a further four controls that aim to capture the quality of a candidate. Here, we conceptualise a candidate of quality as one that is likely to be successfully elected. We expect that where candidates are more likely to be elected, they should attract more encouragement to run in general. In particular, elected politicians and party activists should be expected to take likelihood of success into account when suggesting that someone should run for office, rather than indiscriminately encouraging those who might be labelled as ‘no-hopers’. Though we should note that, in general, we should expect someone who stands out as a being likely to mount a strong campaign to receive encouragement from all sources, including friends and family.

The problem of determining candidate quality is a complex one, with no consensus as to what constitutes a quality candidate. We have therefore chosen to use three ex-ante measures and one ex-post measure to address this issue. With respect to the ex-ante measures, we include three variables to capture the resources available to the individual candidate. First, the level of household income reported by the candidate. Candidates with access to greater financial resources can be expected to be able to mount a more successful campaign, since even party candidates will contribute financially to their campaign funds. We might also expect those with higher incomes to have the ability to absorb costs related to the campaign (e.g. paying for childcare while on a canvass). We should further note that while local election campaigns are much less expensive to run than general election ones,³ it is still plausible that greater access to financial resources will impact the likelihood of success. The questionnaire asked respondents to report their pre-tax household income in the year prior to the local election being held across 8 categories, with the lowest category being ‘less than €20,000’ and the highest category being ‘€110,000+’. In the sample, the median pre-tax household income is €35,000-€49,999. For the purposes of this analysis, we have coded these categories into a low (up to €34,999), medium (€40,000 to €79,999) and high (€80,000 and over) income groups.

We include an education control which aims to capture access to social or professional networks on which the candidate might be able to tap into in order to raise campaign funds or to use in order to mobilise support for their candidacy more generally. Respondents were asked to report their highest level of education received in a textbox provided in the booklet, with these open-ended responses then coded into ten categories by the research team (from primary education to a doctorate). For the purposes of the analysis in this paper we have collapsed these ten categories into three: low (covering primary education to third level non-degree), medium (primary degree and/or professional qualification), and high (any postgraduate education).

The third ex-ante measure of candidate quality is the size of the campaign team of the respondent. We argue that we can categorise candidates with larger campaign teams as higher quality for two reasons. First, having a larger team of people to support the candidate throughout the campaign should be expected to increase the likelihood of the candidate being successfully elected. In particular, it can be crucial to have a large volume of personnel to cover the Local Electoral Area (LEA) during the all-important canvasses. Candidates who have

smaller teams will find it harder to cover the entire LEA and may need to be more strategic about how they access members of the electorate. Second, we expect that candidates that are more likely to win will be better able to assemble a team around them. For example, a long-time incumbent of an established political party should have an existing personal network within the LEA that they can call upon, in comparison with someone who is running for the first time. There is substantial variation in the size of the campaign teams reported by the respondents. Thirteen candidates reported that they had no team outside of themselves, while six reported that their teams comprised at least 100 people. The mean size of the campaign teams across all candidates is 13.73.

Finally, we include one ex-post measure of candidate quality (i.e. a measure taken from after the election). Given that we are defining a quality candidate here as one that is likely to be elected, we can use the information available to us as part of the questionnaire to directly measure the extent to which a candidate was able to successfully attract votes. While we did not ask respondents whether they were successfully elected due to concerns about identifiability, we did ask them to report the number of first preference votes that they received. This variable was a categorical one ranging from fewer than 100 (1) to 1,200+ (8). Again, for the purposes of this analysis, we collapsed these eight categories into three covering low (fewer than 200), medium (201 to 800), and high (more than 801).

Since our first dependent variable, intensity of encouragement, is count data (i.e. the number of sources that encouraged the respondent to run), we carried out our analysis using a Poisson Regression model to test hypothesis one. For hypothesis two, we have seven dependent variables that are binary (i.e. can take values 0 or 1), so used a series of Logistic Regression models in order to test it. The next section presents the results.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Before we turn to the multivariate analysis, it is worth taking a moment to examine the variation in our eight dependent variables. Figure 1 presents the full distribution of support and indicates that the intensity of encouragement to run was moderate across candidates. Just under 9 percent of respondents indicated that they received no encouragement to run with the median level of support received by all candidates being equal to 2. Men and women report differing levels of support. The mean intensity of encouragement for men was 2.00 compared with 2.69 for women.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Table 1 compares the share of candidates receiving encouragement to run prior to standing as a candidate for the first time for each of the seven sources by gender. To test for a statistically significant difference in receiving encouragement to run from each source by gender we used Fisher's exact test; the results are presented in the final column of the table. We can see that five of these differences are statistically significant.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The biggest differences emerge with respect to receiving encouragement to run from a family member; more than 45 percent of female respondents indicated that they had received encouragement to run from this source, compared with just 28.5 percent of men. Taken together, these preliminary results indicate that gender seems to matter for receiving encouragement to run for office, and it seems to matter in the ways outlined by our hypotheses.

Regression analysis

This section presents the results of the regression analysis, which examines the relationships between variables presented in Table 1 for statistical significance, as well as testing for a relationship between intensity of encouragement and gender. Model 1 in Table 2 presents the results of the latter analysis, while Models 2 to 8 (Table 3) investigate whether gender helps to explain the source from which the encouragement to run is derived.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The results from Model 1 are in line with hypothesis 1. As expected, controlling for resources, candidate quality and party identification, women who ran in the local election in 2019 were encouraged to run for election with greater intensity than were their male counterparts.

Models 2 to 8 investigate hypothesis 2, testing for gendered patterns with respect to source of encouragement. We fail to detect any gender differences for encouragement to run by a party activist (Model 3), friend (Model 4), colleague (Model 7) or ‘other’ source (Model 8). The coefficient for the female candidate variable is positive but not statistically significant across all of these models. However, we find evidence for gendered patterns of encouragement to run for the three remaining models. Female candidates are 1.71 times more likely than male candidates to be encouraged to run by elected politicians (Model 2). They are also 2.38 times more likely to receive such encouragement to run from their family (Model 5) and 2.16 times more likely to receive it from their spouse (Model 6). It appears then that there is some evidence for gendered patterns in the support received by candidates.

It is worth taking a moment to examine the results with respect to the controls in the model. As we can see from the coefficients of the party identification variable, non-party candidates report receiving less encouragement to run overall, and they are less likely to be encouraged to run by elected politicians and party activists. This is what we would expect to observe empirically. Candidates who ran for the Green Party enjoyed an intensity of support (Model 1) that was slightly higher when compared to Fine Gael candidates, and they were also

more likely to be encouraged to run by an elected politician. Sinn Féin candidates reported being slightly less likely to be encouraged to run by their families, though result is likely simply due to the low number of respondents from this party who reported receiving encouragement to run from this source, rather than indicating anything truly distinct about candidates who run for party.

The rest of the controls in the model aimed to capture the quality of the candidate, since we can assume that higher quality candidates are more likely to receive encouragement to run in general and may be more likely to receive such encouragement from particular sources. We included three ex-ante measures of quality (size of campaign team, level of education, and income level) and one ex-post measure (that is, the number of first preference votes received by the candidate at the local election). None of these controls impacts on the intensity of support received. However, we observe some limited effects with respect to the models examining the each of the sources of support in turn. Candidates who received medium (201 to 800) and high (801+) numbers of first preference votes at the election were more likely to have been encouraged to run by an elected politician. This suggests that elected politicians are more frequently encouraging people to run who they think are likely to attract votes. Though, having encouraged a candidate to run, they are also likely to be engaging in activities to support their campaign and to assist them in gaining votes.

Campaign team size is not a predictor of the encouragement to run that a candidate reports receiving. And it is only in one model that we find a statistically significant effect for the education variable; those individuals with a medium level of education are more likely to receive encouragement to run from an ‘other’ source. However, we should avoid overinterpreting this result due to the low number of respondents who reported receiving encouragement to run for office from this source, so this result is likely simply an artefact of the data rather than a finding of theoretical significance.

However, it is interesting to note that candidates who fall into the medium- and high-income categories are more likely to be encouraged to run by their families (Model 6) and those in the high income category are more likely to be encouraged to run by their partner (Model 7). Individuals in the high-income category are less likely to be encouraged to run by an ‘other’ source, though, again, we should avoid overinterpreting this finding due to the low number of affirmative responses.

On the whole, what stands out most about these controls is the extent to which they fail to adequately predict the level or source of support that is received by the candidates in this sample. We might think that this suggests candidate quality is largely unrelated to encouragement to run (i.e. that individuals do not take into account likelihood of success or ability to mount a campaign when encouraging someone to run for office). However, this is highly unlikely, particularly when we consider the fact that the level of votes accumulated at the ballot box does act as a predictor of whether an elected politician is going to encourage a candidate to run for office. A more likely explanation is that these variables are not adequately controlling for candidate quality.

Robustness checks

We carried out a series of robustness checks in order to further investigate the results presented in the section above. First, we assessed all models for multicollinearity. None of the variance

inflation factors for the intensity model or for the seven models covering the different sources of encouragement indicated that this was an issue that warranted further investigation.

Second, there were two models that warranted further examination in light of the statistically significant results that we found. Specifically, we were interested in investigating the findings that women were more likely to be encouraged to run by a family member (Model 5) and that they were more likely to be encouraged to run by a spouse (Model 6). It was possible that these results arose due to some underlying differences between the types of men and women who are running for local office. If women who run are more likely to come from political families, then they might be more likely to attract greater support from their family.

Family links or ‘political dynasties’ have long been a feature of Irish politics. While it is most common among candidates from the two main parties (Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil), the share of candidates running for Dáil Éireann enjoying such a family link has hovered around 15 percent for the last several elections (Reidy, 2021). So, to address the former concern (i.e. that the observed gender differences might be due to an increased likelihood of belonging to a political dynasty), we included a control in our model capturing whether the respondent reported having any family member that had been active in public life, or held political office in Ireland at any level. The inclusion of this control did not affect the statistical significance of the coefficient on the key independent variable; women were still more likely than men to report having received encouragement to run from this source.

Further, we might be interested in whether the results for these models are being driven by differences in relationship or parental status. We noted above that demanding political careers can create a conflict between work and family life (Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2019). If the women who responded to the survey are different from the men along these dimensions, then this might explain why we observe these gendered patterns of encouragement to run.

If women are more likely to be partnered for instance, then this might explain why they report receiving higher levels of encouragement to run from their spouse or partner (Model 6). Testing the robustness of this result is somewhat challenging. The questionnaire included a question on marital status, so we omitted those who reported being single, as well as those who reported being separated, divorced, or widowed at the time of completing the survey. The statistical significance of the gender variable was unchanged; women were still more likely to report receiving encouragement to run than were their male counterparts. However, we should be slightly cautious. We discuss this in more detail below, but there is a temporal issue here. The survey is asking about encouragement to run prior to the first campaign that the respondent mounted, but the demographics section reports information at the time that the survey is being filled out. It is perfectly possible for marital status to have changed between a respondent’s first campaign and the time that the survey was completed (2019). However, we have no strong intuition that such changes might affect one group more than another in such a way that might challenge the robustness of these findings.

We were also concerned with investigating whether the female candidates’ status as mothers explains why they received more encouragement to run from their spouses and families. That is, it may be the case that women who had these caring responsibilities would not run for office without encouragement from these sources and would in fact seek permission before taking on a time-consuming campaign. We do not have an item in the survey that simply asks respondents to report whether they are a parent. Parents with grown children would

identify their status using this item, but the calculation around running for office is substantially different for parents who are currently raising their children. Instead, we include an item asking respondents to report the number of children in their care under the age of fifteen.⁴ Using this variable, we coded respondents into parents and non-parents, then ran these regression models again including an interaction term between the ‘female’ variable and the parent variable to test for a motherhood effect. The interaction term was not statistically significant in any of the models. We can conclude, therefore, that the gender gap in encouragement received by candidates from these sources is not explained by a preponderance of women who are mothers seeking approval from their spouse and wider family.

Thirdly, thinking about the survey as a whole, we are relying on self-reported measures of encouragement to run for office. This is potentially problematic since respondents might fail to recall whether they received encouragement to run from a particular source, or may misrepresent the encouragement that they did receive (either by over- or understating it). There was no way for us to directly address this issue. However, we were able to leverage another item in the questionnaire to check the plausibility of the responses provided with respect to the encouragement to run items.

The *LECS 2019* survey included an item that asked respondents to explain why they had decided to stand for election the first time they chose to do so. The item read as follows: ‘For many people, deciding to run for political office can be a difficult decision to make. Thinking about the first time you decided to stand as a candidate, what would you say was your main reason for putting yourself forward?’ Respondents were presented with a textbox which they could fill with their open-ended response. Only 25 respondents chose not to answer this question. For the majority who did provide a response, we were able to compare their reasons for running with their responses to the encouragement to run items.

On the whole, these text responses chime with the self-reported items about encouragement to run. Candidates who stated that they were running on a single issue, did not tend to report receiving encouragement to run from party sources⁵, while candidates with familial ties to political parties reported that they received encouragement to run from those sources⁶.

Related to this concern over the accuracy of the reported support received is the impact that the time since the candidate first mounted a campaign and they completed the survey might have on their responses. Put simply, we can assume that candidates who ran for the first time in 2019 will have better recall of the encouragement to run that they received prior to doing so, while respondents who first ran several years ago may be less able to report this with accuracy.

In order to try to control for this in our models, we included a dummy variable for whether the respondent had previously run as a candidate at any level and ran all of the models again. When we include this control, we find that the results outlined in the previous section remain largely unaffected. Women still report receiving a higher intensity of encouragement to run than do men. Further, they are still more likely than men to be encouraged to run by their spouse and to be encouraged to run by a family member. They also remain more likely to be encouraged to run by an elected politician, though the addition of this control means that this variable is now statistically significant at the ten percent level.

Conclusion

Overall, we find evidence that in Ireland encouragement to run for office is gendered. Women who ran in the 2019 local elections report that they received more encouragement to do so than did their male counterparts. Further, we find they are more likely to have been encouraged to run by an elected politician, a spouse, or a family member.

Previous research that has been carried out in an American context finds that encouragement to run is a predictor of whether someone chooses to do so or takes steps towards doing so, and that women are less likely to receive such encouragement and therefore the lack of it is one explanation for the gender gap political ambition that has been observed (Fox & Lawless, 2004; 2010). And Culhane's (2017) research on candidate selection indicates that in Ireland women can expect to be approached by party figures to encourage them run less often than men. Our findings complement rather than contradict this research. By examining gender differences in encouragement to run that candidates received prior to standing for office for the first time, we can draw inferences about the circumstances under which women will run for office.

In Ireland, it appears that women who run for office require more encouragement before they will choose to do so. In particular, they are more likely than men to require the support of their spouse and their broader family, as well as encouragement from elected politicians. Significantly, we find that these results are not simply explained by motherhood or relationship status (i.e. by women having more familial responsibilities that lead them to seek approval before they can run).

Nor are these results explained as a result of the increased demand for female candidates that was brought about by the introduction of the gender quota in Ireland – though the effect of the quota on the local level is of course an indirect one. While it is expected that 2019 saw an increase in the efforts of political parties to recruit more women by reaching out to specific women to encourage them to run, we cannot simply attribute our findings to the response of Irish political parties to the quota. As we noted above, the survey item asks about the first time the respondent ran for office, rather than the most recent time (which would have been 2019, when the survey was carried out). We also continue observe these gender differences even when we control for previous candidacy (i.e. whether candidates ran for the first time in 2019 or not).

We conclude by noting that our findings suggest several interesting future avenues for research. First, it is important to consider whether these gender differences with respect to encouragement to run that the respondents received are genuinely due to differences in encouragement or if they are due to women being more likely to acknowledge this encouragement. It might be the case either that male respondents tend to present themselves as having made the decision independently and without any input, or that they fail to recall the encouragement that they have received. This is something that we were unable to test for in this analysis, but might at least partially explain the results that we find here.

Second, future research should broaden the investigation of encouragement to run by exploring potential the gender differences among those individuals who have been identified as being most likely to run for office without having done so (i.e. the eligibility pool). In this way we can deepen our understanding of these gendered patterns of encouragement and

examine whether these patterns hold in the wider female population, or if there is something particular about the women in the sample who have put themselves forward to run. In particular, given what we know about the gendered nature of candidate recruitment (Kenny, 2013), it may be the case that there are substantial differences between the women who receive such encouragement to run and choose to do so, and those women in the wider population. This point is also related to the earlier discussion on candidate quality. While we attempted to control for candidate quality in our models on the basis that higher quality candidates should have received more encouragement to run since their likelihood of success is greater, it is clear from the lack of statistical significance on most of these controls that we have not adequately captured this in the models. This need not threaten our findings with respect to gendered patterns of encouragement. However, if it is the case that women are receiving more encouragement to run because they are of higher quality than their male counterparts, then the implications of these results are slightly different. That is, we would want to consider why women who run appear to be of higher quality than the men who choose to put themselves forward. And we might also want to consider whether being of higher quality under these circumstances involves these women successfully approximating stereotypical conceptions of what it means to be an ideal candidate (see Culhane, 2017 for a discussion).

Finally, there is considerable scope here to uncover complexities in the patterns of encouragement to run. For example, for those who are considering running for the first time, what kind of support is most valued by them – encouragement from those associated with political parties, or encouragement from family members, for example? We might also consider the sequence in which such encouragement is offered and whether this matters for the decision to run or not to run. It is possible, for example, that encouragement to run by a party representative or official might produce a knock-on effect whereby others (e.g. spouse, family, friends) would be more likely to offer such encouragement since an approach by a party is seen as indicative of likely success or practical support. Understanding more about the dynamics around encouragement to run can help to further clarify the circumstances under which women will run for office.

Notes

¹ While the quota has exclusively benefitted women since its implementation, due to their underrepresentation among party candidates, the legislation is written in gender neutral terms. The quota dictates that at least 30 per cent of candidates must be men and 30 per cent women.

² These five parties are Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, the Green Party, Sinn Féin and the Labour Party.

³ The maximum spending limit for the largest local electoral area (LEA) is €13,000 compared with €42,500 for a five-seat constituency. Though we can note that in practice party candidates will get to spend less than the maximum, since they will allocate a tenth of this spending limit to the national agent of the party on an automatic basis (Quinlivan, 2020).

⁴ The cut-off at age fifteen was chosen since we expect children in general to be more independent at this age, potentially allowing parents more free time to engage in a political

campaign if they choose to do so. We should note, however, that we do not include items for additional caring responsibilities in relation to elderly relatives or children fifteen and over who experience additional needs. It is the case then that this variable does not completely capture the burden that candidates may experience with respect to care.

⁵ For example, one candidate who reported receiving encouragement to run for office from one source only – the ‘other’ category, which he subsequently clarified was from a campaign group in the local area that he was involved in – gave this response when asked why he had decided to run for the first time ‘I didn't put myself forward. I had no interest in politics. I was asked to stand.’

⁶ One respondent stated that the reason he decided to run for the first time was ‘[t]o continue the work my father had done over 25 years as a local councillor...’. Unsurprisingly, this candidate was approached by an elected politician and by a party activist about running, as well as reporting receiving encouragement to run from his family.

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Fig. 2. Frequency distribution of intensity of encouragement to run (DV1)

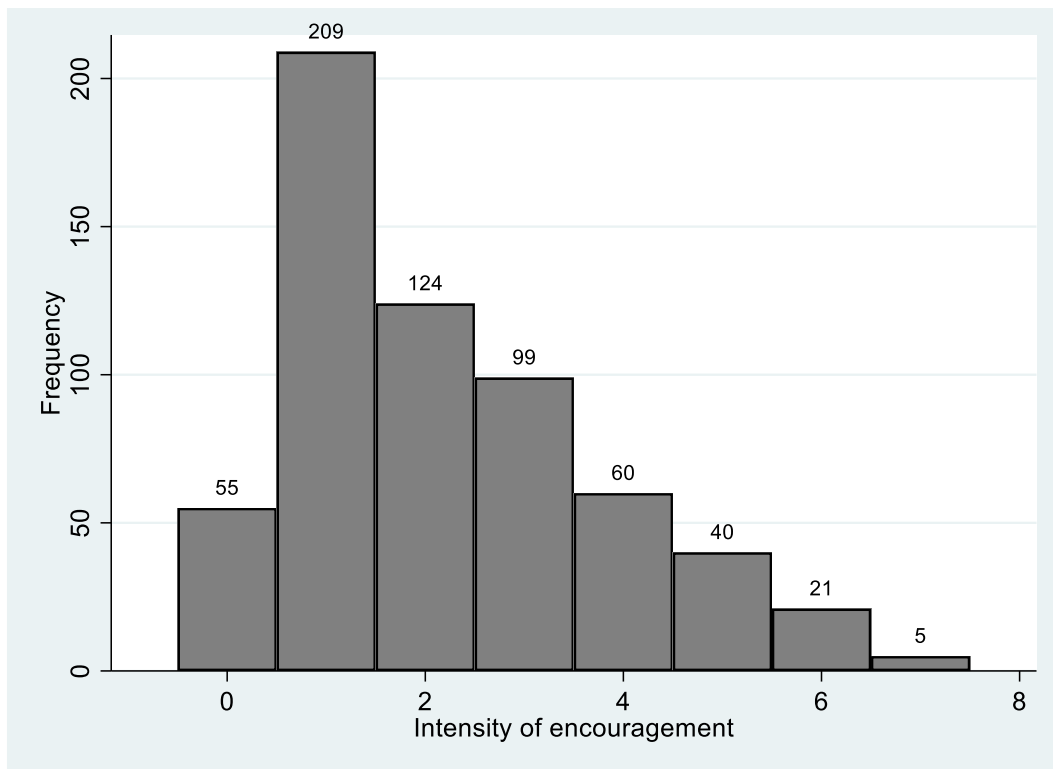


Table 1. Share of candidates receiving encouragement to run across all sources (by gender)

Source of encouragement	N	% receiving encouragement to run	
		Men	Women
Elected politician	615	46.60	59.02
Party activist	615	49.30	58.47
Friend	614	41.88	51.91
Family member	614	28.47	45.36
Spouse	613	16.47	29.51
Work Colleague	613	12.00	16.39
Other	613	6.12	8.20

Table 2. Regression results for intensity of encouragement to run

	Model 1: intensity
Female	0.25*** (0.06)
Fianna Fáil	-0.03 (0.09)
Labour	-0.02 (0.11)
Sinn Féin	-0.08 (0.12)
Green Party	0.17* (0.10)
Other Party	-0.00 (0.10)
Non-party	-0.25** (0.10)
Campaign team size	0.00 (0.00)
First preference votes: medium	0.17 (0.17)
First preference votes: high	0.06 (0.17)
Income: medium	0.09 (0.07)
Income: high	0.14 (0.09)
Education: medium	0.04 (0.08)
Education: high	0.03 (0.08)
Observations	542

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3. Regression results of source of encouragement to run

	Model 2: elected politician	Model 3: party activist	Model 4: friend	Model 5: family	Model 6: spouse	Model 7: colleague	Model 8: other
Female	0.53** (0.21)	0.17 (0.21)	0.32 (0.20)	0.87*** (0.21)	0.77*** (0.24)	0.39 (0.28)	0.24 (0.40)
Fianna Fáil	-0.33 (0.27)	-0.27 (0.27)	0.19 (0.27)	0.13 (0.28)	-0.32 (0.34)	0.54 (0.41)	-0.13 (0.59)
Labour	0.52 (0.41)	0.32 (0.40)	-0.08 (0.39)	-0.45 (0.42)	-0.73 (0.51)	0.48 (0.55)	-1.04 (1.11)
Sinn Féin	-0.17 (0.40)	0.06 (0.40)	0.27 (0.39)	-0.84* (0.46)	-0.49 (0.49)	0.46 (0.55)	-0.40 (0.84)
Green Party	0.61* (0.37)	0.58 (0.37)	0.45 (0.34)	0.43 (0.35)	0.03 (0.41)	0.50 (0.49)	-1.64 (1.10)
Other Party	-0.45 (0.33)	0.21 (0.33)	0.53 (0.32)	-0.19 (0.34)	-0.06 (0.38)	-0.02 (0.51)	-0.33 (0.65)
Non-party	-0.64** (0.29)	-1.84*** (0.32)	0.28 (0.29)	-0.17 (0.31)	-0.15 (0.36)	0.21 (0.45)	0.45 (0.55)
Campaign team size	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
First preference votes: medium	1.94*** (0.57)	-0.04 (0.45)	-0.20 (0.39)	0.58 (0.48)	0.47 (0.51)	-0.24 (0.52)	-0.50 (0.58)
First preference votes: high	2.09*** (0.58)	-0.30 (0.46)	-0.55 (0.41)	0.43 (0.50)	0.08 (0.54)	-0.59 (0.56)	-0.95 (0.67)
Income: medium	0.21 (0.22)	0.19 (0.22)	0.15 (0.21)	0.43* (0.23)	0.20 (0.27)	-0.06 (0.31)	-0.40 (0.40)
Income: high	0.33 (0.27)	0.17 (0.28)	-0.11 (0.27)	0.66** (0.28)	0.82** (0.32)	0.12 (0.38)	-1.25* (0.67)
Education: medium	0.01 (0.24)	-0.13 (0.25)	0.19 (0.24)	0.07 (0.25)	-0.01 (0.30)	-0.03 (0.36)	0.91* (0.48)
Education: high	0.02 (0.23)	-0.16 (0.24)	0.16 (0.22)	0.04 (0.24)	-0.03 (0.28)	0.17 (0.33)	0.51 (0.49)
Observations	544	543	542	542	542	542	542

Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

