

9-2017

Underrepresentation of Women in Politics: Focus on New York City

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UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS: FOCUS ON NEW YORK CITY

by

YULIYA SZCZEPANSKI

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, the City University of New York

2017

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Yuliya Szczepanski

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Underrepresentation of Women in Politics: Focus on New York City

by

Yuliya Szczepanski

Advisor: Professor John Mollenkopf

This thesis examines how the factors that account for underrepresentation of women in American politics play out in New York City. Although women comprise more than a half of the country's population, and more women than men are registered and turn out to vote, the United States is below average in terms of percentage of women politicians as compared to other countries, and keeps dropping in those ratings. Further, New York City, arguably one of the most diverse and liberal cities in the U.S., has never elected a female mayor, and, in 2017, only about a quarter of the city council members are women, with that share set to drop after the 2017 municipal elections. Despite gender inequality being one of the major societal cleavages in the United States, women do not seem to be mobilized to run and vote on gender disparities in representation. It is important to shed light on this subject as both descriptive and substantive representation of women is vital in a democratic republic such as the United States. Having more female role models in political leadership has been proven to translate into an increased political engagement for women, and female politicians' commitment to championing issues such as healthcare, social services, reproductive health, education, etc., cannot be overlooked. This thesis identifies several significant factors that explain low numbers of female politicians such as political party recruitment, family responsibilities, traditional gender socialization, and urban political context of New York City.

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Introduction and Research Question.

Over the past decade, we have seen the emergence of several high-profile women occupying or running for upper-level positions in the U.S. and New York City government. Examples include Nancy Pelosi, Sarah Palin, Jill Stein, Christine Quinn, and, of course, Hillary Clinton, whose defeat in 2016 does not belie the fact that she was the first female candidate nominated by a major party to compete in the general presidential election in the U.S. Although the landscape of American politics appears to be changing in favor of gender equality, these cases are still the exception and women are being integrated into the political arena very slowly. In spite of composing more than a half of the country's population and more than a half of its eligible electorate, women are still grossly underrepresented at each level of government. According to the data gathered by the Center for American Women and Politics, in 2017, only 19.6 % of the members of the U.S. Congress are female and 25.0% in state legislatures. Also, women occupy only 20.8 % of mayoral offices in cities with population over 30,000 and 20 mayors in 100 largest U.S. cities are female as well (CAWP, 2017).

Underrepresentation of women in politics is puzzling for several reasons. First, it has been almost a century since women were granted the right to vote, and, in fact, since 1980, more women than men have registered and turned out to vote (Crowder-Meyer, 2011). This indicates that women participate more actively in the democratic process of electing public officials, but fail to emerge as candidates themselves. Second, despite the fact the U.S. is among the leading countries that promote gender equality and economic opportunity worldwide, we remain below world average in terms of percentage of female politicians (Fox and Lawless, 2010, p.310). Ironically, progressive hubs like New York State and especially the City of New York have lagged even further behind when it comes to electing women mayors. There are notably very few

female mayors elected within cities across the state of New York as compared to other states across the nation or even big cities around the world. Even more strikingly, New York City has never elected a female mayor (Blay and Soiero, 1979; CAWP, 2017; Holli, 1997; Koyuncu and Sumbas, 2016; McCaig, 1999).

Such disparity in numbers of male and female politicians, including those occupying mayor's positions, poses a serious problem for the quality of democracy and political representation. The full inclusion of women into the political playing field is important, first of all, in terms of descriptive representation. That is, having more female role models in political leadership positions would certainly encourage the younger generation of women to engage in politics and some day run for office. In addition, if more women ran and got elected, the government at all levels would more adequately reflect the entire population which would likely increase the average American's trust in government (Clark, 1991, p. 64). Thus, there are reasons to believe that descriptive representation of women is vital for the quality of our democracy (Karing and Welsh, 1979; Mansbridge, 1999; Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Smith, Reingold, & Owens, 2012).

In addition to descriptive reasons, increasing the number of women occupying high-level offices in politics would bolster women's commitment to championing the so-called "women's issues." Studies have shown that women politicians, in fact, tend to give more importance to issues related to healthcare, social services, reproductive health, and family, as compared to their male counterparts (Crowder-Meyer, 2011; Gregory, 2011; Holman 2013; Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007; Taylor, 2013). For example, a 1986 study showed a direct impact on increasing female municipal employment in cities where female mayors were in office (Saltzstein, 1986, p. 140). This means that electing more women would most likely increase the championing of

women's interests and policies that are important to the entire population, nationwide as well as locally, which is also known as substantive representation. Thus, the importance of having more women in elective offices would clearly improve the nature of political representation and pave the way for gender parity in politics.

Many scholars have contributed to the ongoing debate on the subject of underrepresentation of women in politics, citing such explanations as gender discrimination, voter bias, and women's historical exclusion from professions that tend to lead to a career in politics, also known as the pipeline theory (Ekstrand and Eckert, 1981; Karing and Welsh, 1979; Lawless and Fox, 2010; Macmanus, 1981; Rosenwasser, Rogers, Fling, Silvers-Pickens, & Butemeyer, 1987; Rule, 1981). However, the research has mostly focused on gender disparities in Congress and state legislatures, whereas scholarship has been scarce in the area of municipal politics. Even if the same factors were at play at all levels of government, some of these explanations seem to have lost their relevance in the new millennium (the pipeline theory, for example). Further, none of them explain what processes affect considering a candidacy early in a woman's life, what factors shape a later decision to enter a race, and how the outside forces influence one's political ambition to ever consider a career in politics – national or local. The most recent scholarship focuses on gender differences in political ambition – a desire to run for and hold a political office. It argues that external forces such as political party gatekeepers play a fundamental role in shaping this ambition by giving preference to male candidates which makes it more challenging for qualified female candidates to run and get elected. (Crowder-Meyer, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Fox & Lawless 2013; Fulton, Maestas, Maisel, & Stone, 2006; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Merritt, 1977).

Thus, in view of multitude of theoretical approaches that attempt to explain women's slow ascension into the world of politics, this research will determine which factors are the most influential. More specifically, I am interested in accounting for underrepresentation of women on the municipal level (city council and mayor's office), in the U.S. in general, and in New York City in particular. Thus, my research question is two-fold:

1) Why are there still so few women in politics in the United States?

2) What explains New York State's and New York City's anomalous elections record as compared to other states and cities within the U.S. and abroad? How do we account for the fact that New York City, arguably the most welcoming, tolerant, and diverse city in America, has never elected a female mayor?

Methodological Design.

This research has been carried out in order to obtain a clearer picture of how the broader gender dynamics in the electoral arena in the United States plays out in New York City. This thesis provides a detailed literature review of the theoretical approaches on the subject of women in politics that political science scholars have identified over the past several decades. It then reviews such factors as sexism and voter bias, pipeline theory, traditional gender socialization and family responsibilities, political party recruitment practices, and gender differences in political ambition. Using the exit poll data from the 1997 New York City mayoral elections, which features a female Democratic nominee, it analyzes voting behavior of New Yorkers in order to identify gender disparities in supporting female candidates among male and female voters of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. This analysis is supplemented with interviews conducted as a part of this project. I reached out to 22 women who either have served, are currently serving, ran for, or are currently running for an elective office in New York. Out of the 22 respondents, 5 agreed to be interviewed for this research project. They include Councilwomen Vanessa Gibson and Karen Koslowitz who currently serve in the New York City Council; former New York City Councilmember, Manhattan Borough President, and 1997 mayoral candidate Ruth Messinger; 2018 candidate for U.S. Congress Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez; and 2017 candidate for New York City Council Ede Fox. Their first-hand experience running for and/or serving in office, as well as their input on the subject of women in politics in general, have been vital for putting in perspective the vast literature on gender differences in political ambition, as well as political parties' and women's organizations' role in reducing gender disparity in politics on the national and local level. This multi-method approach has been designed to test my preliminary hypothesis that those major factors that account for women's underrepresentation in

politics nationwide such as voter sexism, family responsibilities, political party recruitment practices, etc., also explain gender differences in NYC politics, at least in part. At the same time, given that many other cities in the United States and worldwide, liberal and conservative, have elected a female mayor at least once, alternative explanations are considered. For instance, demographic and/or socio-economic peculiarities of New York City may also inhibit women's full inclusion into the political playing field. The specifics of New York City's government structure as well as its gender composition will be analyzed in order to determine to what degree New York's urban political context contributes to slow ascension of women into politics.

Section I: Literature review.

Many explanations have been proposed to account for underrepresentation of women in politics. For the past several decades, scholars of political science have been trying to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the gender gap in American political institutions. Most of the research conducted by scholars in the 1970s and 1980s was done to determine the degree to which gender discrimination and voter bias affected women's representation on the national and state level (Ekstrand & Eckert, 1981; Rosenwasser et al., 1987; Rule, 1981). Little attention, however, was paid to underrepresentation of women in local politics. A few decades later, studies started to show that discrimination against women and negative attitudes toward women candidates were on the decline, so political scientists then turned to the "pipeline" theory (Brians, 2005; Clark 1991; Lawless & Fox, 2010). The notion of the "pipeline" was introduced to tackle women's historical exclusion from the professions that usually precede political careers, such as law, business, and education. Thus, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, gender discrimination, voter bias, and the "pipeline" theory were the most researched approaches that were used to explain why women remained a minority in the field of politics.

Let us begin with the earliest and the most researched explanations of women's underrepresentation in politics - overt gender discrimination and sexism of voters. Some literature suggests, that in the 1970s and 1980s, gender bias in politics created a hostile environment for potential female candidates which was a huge disincentive for them to ever run for office (Ekstrand & Eckert, 1981; Rosenwasser et al., 1987; Rule, 1981). The few women who succeeded and became candidates were often times treated with a sexist attitude in a male dominated political arena. For Example, U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer recalls serving in office in

1972, saying that, "[to] be a woman in politics was almost a masochistic experience, a series of setbacks with not a lot of rewards" (as cited in Lawless & Fox, 2010, p. 24). Similar accounts of hostile political environment were underscored by many scholars who wrote about women in politics in the last decades of the 20th century (Ekstrand & Eckert, 1981; Karing & Welsh, 1979; Macmanus, 1981; Rule, 1981).

Yet other scholars failed to find solid evidence of negative attitudes towards women in politics. Among them, Ekstrand and Eckert (1981), who conducted a study to determine the impact of candidates' sex on voter choice, and found that "respondents in general did not exhibit a bias against women candidates" (p. 86). Similarly, another study, performed before the 1984 Congressional election, was conducted to determine the level of voter sexism, which was thought to be a major factor contributing to the scarcity of women in Congress. The results showed that while the participants rated male candidates higher on so-called "masculine tasks" and female candidates on "feminine tasks", overall though, almost no evidence of voter sexism was found (Rosenwasser et al., 1987, p. 191).

In the 21st century, research on the subject of gender discrimination in politics has continued to produce mixed results. More and more studies started to show that gender discrimination and voter bias were on the decline or almost-non-existent. Some scholars still asserted that gender played a role in politics, but they were reluctant to give it a pejorative label of gender discrimination. For example, Barbara Boxer had a much more positive outlook on women in politics in 1992 as compared to 1972, pointing out a more hospitable political climate (as cited in Lawless & Fox, 2010, p.24). Also, Brians (2005) in his article "Women for Women: Gender and Party Bias in Voting for Female Candidates" found no evidence of gender bias, stating that female candidates gain marginally greater support from women voters, and men tend

to equally split their votes between male and female candidates (p. 363). Of course, there are still studies that demonstrate how gender continues to affect campaigns and elections, which suggests that bias against female politicians may still exist in its subtler forms, and is primarily evident in the media coverage of female candidates (Lawless & Fox, 2010). But most of the findings, however, suggest that societal rejection of female candidates has indeed declined, and the public's attitudes have evolved.

Another major area of research aimed at explaining women's low numbers in government was the so-called "pipeline" explanation, i.e. attributing gender disparities in political office to women's historical exclusion from professions that usually lead to a career in politics. Just like in the previous areas of research - discrimination and voter bias - the "pipeline" theory has produced mixed outcomes. Scholars find that, although there is no more de jure discrimination (women are not prohibited by law from getting advanced degrees and pursuing careers that yield prospective candidates), there are still de facto obstacles. For example, Clark (1991) has discovered that sex-role socialization limits women's political participation and leads to exclusion of women from occupations that lead to careers in politics (p. 72). According to Clark (1991), inability to achieve a higher socio-economic status tends to restrict women's capability to run for office.

Lawless and Fox in their book *It Still Takes a Candidate* (2010) paint a more complex picture that reflects gender disparities in pipeline professions in the 21st century. They highlight a theory that if more women occupy careers in law, business, and education, eventually, there will be more women running for office (Lawless & Fox, 2010, p. 30). Although the authors acknowledge that during the past couple of decades the number of women holding degrees in such majors and entering such careers did increase, they argue that "full integration of women

into all of the pipeline professions ... may take decades" (Lawless & Fox, 2010, p. 30). Lawless and Fox (2010) came to this conclusion based on the data gathered from the major fields that tend to precede a career in politics. For instance, as of 2009, the National Association of Law Placement shows that women constitute only 19% of the partners in major law firms, mostly occupying professions of associates and senior attorneys. In the business world, "men still overwhelmingly dominate the upper ranks" (Lawless & Fox, 2010, p.31), and in higher education, despite the fact that more than a half of doctoral recipients are women, the gender gap in tenured faculty persists (Lawless & Fox, 2010, p.32). Therefore, these findings suggest that the number of female candidates is likely to increase, but it will happen very gradually.

Yet another body of research focuses on gender differences in political ambition and ways in which traditional gender socialization affects this ambition. Many political science scholars argue that political ambition of women is largely determined by external factors such as traditional gender socialization and family obligations (Clark, 1991; Fulton et al., 2006; Lawless & Fox, 2013; Merritt, 1977). That is, these factors negatively affect women's ambition and substantially reduce the chances they will ever consider running for office in the future. In 2001 and 2008, Fox and Lawless conducted the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study which was designed to determine gender differences in political ambition of adult men and women. It was a random national sample of men and women who occupy one of the four professions that usually precede seeking a career in an elective office such as business, law, education, and politics. In 2001, 1,969 men and 1,796 women (the total of 3,765 citizens) were surveyed. The survey data was also supplemented with the information gathered from in-depth interviews conducted with 200 of the survey respondents. The second wave of the study, which was surveying 2,036 men and women of original sample of respondents, was conducted in 2008. The data gathered from

the two surveys was used to evaluate gender differences in political ambition of the respondents. The results clearly showed that "despite comparable credentials, backgrounds, and experiences, accomplished women are substantially less likely than similarly situated men to perceive themselves as qualified to seek office" (Fox & Lawless, 2011, p.59). Not only did the female respondents doubt their abilities to engage in politics, but the results also demonstrated that women with young children were less likely than men to attend political meetings, serve on boards, consider running for office, and seemed to be less politically active in general. Female respondents indicated that they were still primarily responsible for child care and maintaining the household (Fox and Lawless, 2011). Evidently, in spite of the fact that many women are now able to have successful careers in formerly male dominated professions, child care responsibilities still remain a factor that they take into consideration when they contemplate ever running for office. Clark (1991), for instance, suggests that there is a way for women to have a career in politics; they may run for an elective when their children are in school. That, of course, will likely result in a significantly delayed ascension of women into the world of politics.

As the literature suggests, gender disparities in child-care responsibilities also decrease political ambition of women who already serve in office, to run for a higher office. It is also known as "progressive ambition". Fulton et al. (2006) conducted a study which examined ways in which gender affects political ambition of state legislators to run for the House of Representatives. As the results demonstrate, female state legislators cite family responsibilities and reluctance to leave their children behind and relocate to Washington, D.C. as the primary reason for not considering running for Congress. Interestingly, the study shows that presence of children in the household reduces women's ambition to run for Congress, whereas men who have children are more likely to run for Congress than men without children (Fulton et al., 2006,

p.p.237-241). Hence, it is clear that gender differences in political ambition extend beyond the initial inclination to seek office; unequal sharing of family responsibilities and child-care obligations certainly seem to hinder women's "progressive" political ambition.

In addition to traditional gender role socialization, unequal sharing of child-care responsibilities and household duties, many political scientists and sociologists agree that political ambition of women who are well-situated to run for office based on their experiences and credentials, is also shaped by structural factors, such as recruitment by political parties. Studies have shown that so-called "electoral gatekeepers" encouragement to consider a career in politics and actually run for office is vital for women candidates. Recruitment and endorsement by political parties is very important in terms of shaping political ambition of women as well as men. It appears, though, that women are asked to engage in politics and run for office by the electoral gatekeepers less often than men, which has a negative effect on women's political ambition (Crowder-Meyer, 2011, p. 4; Fulton et al., 2006, p. 242; Paxton et al., 2007, p.270; Rule, 1981, p. 71).

Who are these "gatekeepers," and what is their role in selecting and endorsing political candidates? Essentially, they are members of political clubs and other party organizations, political activists, and elected officials who screen potential candidates for office, reach out to them, and endorse them. They also control the process of nominations at all levels of government, especially during special elections. Thus, it is very important for a candidate to receive their endorsement (Fox & Lawless, 2010, p.312; Paxton et al., 2007, p. 270). Political parties are strategic and selective in their recruitment process. Studies show gender bias in their recruitment practices, primarily because political parties themselves are still male dominated, and male party leaders often give preference to male candidates. As a result, long standing male

domination of political institutions in the United States still has an effect on gatekeepers' candidate selection process. Political party networks are still overwhelmingly male, and so political candidates are often identified and recruited from within those networks, which puts women at a disadvantage. Further, there are women that have reported actually being discouraged from running for office, and instead were offered a low-profile job by the gatekeepers (Fox & Lawless, 2010, p. 312).

In order to test the extent to which political parties are still male dominated, Fox and Lawless asked their 2008 Citizen Panel Study participants (discussed in the previous section) questions about political party recruitment processes including frequency of recruitment and whether they were discouraged from running by various kinds of political actors. The results showed that women were indeed less likely to be actively sought out by electoral gatekeepers, but those who did, were more likely to respond positively and exhibited a higher ambition to run for office. Further, the results demonstrated that among men and women who were never approached by the gatekeepers, females were 50% less likely to consider a career in politics. Thus, it is clear that political party recruitment is crucial in terms of boosting political ambition of potential women candidates. Women respond positively and are more likely to emerge as candidates when recruited; the problem appears to be, however, that political parties are not making enough of a conscious effort to bring more qualified women into the electoral arena. Overall, the scholarship on political ambition clearly reveals that the societal norms and perceptions about the "appropriate" gender roles and long-standing male domination in politics are still deeply embedded in our society.

On the bright side, however, women's organizations now seem to be working to encourage women to run for office and mitigate the gender gap in politics, thus boosting

women's political ambition. These organizations seek out and train potential female candidates, and often fund their political campaigns. They serve as mediators between women candidates and electoral gatekeepers. Based on the evidence gathered from the survey conducted by Lawless and Fox in 2008, women candidates who worked with women's organizations were 34% more likely than those who did not to be recruited by the gatekeepers (Lawless & Fox, 2010, p. 105). Women's organizations' assistance is also vital in terms of campaign finance. Financial contributions are especially important early in the process when political parties are still not sure in if a particular female candidate is worth supporting and can actually win the election. The most prominent organizations are EMILY's List, WISH list, the Women's Campaign Fund, the National Women's Political Caucus, and of course, the National Organization for Women (NOW) (Burrell, 2006, Lawless & Fox, 2010). Thus, it appears that women's organizations are playing an important role in motivating qualified women to engage in politics and increase their political ambition, which is especially crucial given that political party recruitment practices don't seem to be very favorable to women.

When it comes to underrepresentation of women on a local level, the research is not as extensive as that which covers gender disparities on state and federal level. There are studies, for instance, that look into the importance of political structures and environments that help or hinder women's inclusion into the municipal political arena. Welsh's and Karing's (1979) article "Correlates of Female Office Holding in City Politics" focuses on city councils and mayoral seats in 264 U.S. cities with population over 25,000. The findings show that first of all, women do better when the office is less desirable (which goes in tandem with the research on political ambition); second, it was determined that mayoral salary and size of the city played a role. Overall though, the authors conclude that demographic and socio-economic factors and formal

political characteristics of the cities are not the major determinants of women's successful inclusions into politics (Welsh & Karing, 1979, p. 491). However, as we will see later, more recent studies shed new light on research in this area.

Other studies on local politics concentrate on the importance of self-selection of female candidates. Adams and Schreiber (2010) look at electoral and fundraising patterns in mayoral and council elections in seven large cities including New York City, and find that women fare just as well as men when they seek municipal office (as is the case when it comes to state and Congressional elections), but fewer women actually run for local offices as compared to state and federal elections. This is another relevant finding which highlights the importance of women making a decision to run for office. Gregory (2011) in her Huffington Post blog “Madame Mayor: Why So Rare?” has also noted that although nationwide the numbers for women serving in Congress and state legislatures are not very high, they are even lower at the local level, especially for mayors. She also rightfully notes that New York is among the cities that have never produced a female mayor, and neither has Los Angeles (Gregory, 2011). Texas, on the other hand, has elected quite a significant number of female mayors. In 2015, among the largest 20 U.S. cities, 13 have elected a female mayor at some point in their history, and as many as 6 of those 13 cities are in the great state of Texas (McCaig, 2015). Moreover, the cities in Texas are famous for electing the first Latina mayor in the U.S (Laredo) and the first openly gay female mayor (Houston); San Antonio was one of the first cities to ever elect a female mayor (McCaig, 2015).

These findings, however, are at odds with those of Smith et al. (2012), whose piece “The Political Determinants of Women’s Descriptive Representation in Cities” states that cities that are more liberal tend to elect a larger percentage of women politicians (p. 321). If these findings

have merit, how do we account the anomalous elective record of New York City? After all, we can't ignore the fact that other countries (Brazil, France, Turkey, etc.), are electing female mayors and some conservative American states produce female mayors as well (Blay and Soiero, 1979; Koyuncu and Sumbas, 2016; "Paris's Mayor," 2014).

Is it that qualified females in the City of New York fail to emerge as candidates? Betsy Gotbaum, a former executive director of the New York Historical Society, for instance, mentioned in her 1998 New York Times interview that she was considering running for mayor in New York City in 2001 (as cited in McFadden, 1998). During her professional career, she has worked as a teacher, an investment banker, a fund-raiser, as well as worked for social service organizations, the NYPD, and the Board of education. Doubtlessly, such a record would qualify her to run for mayor. She decided not to run for mayor, but instead, Gotbaum ran and got elected to serve as New York City Public Advocate. Then, in 2005, Virginia Fields, another qualified candidate, ran for mayor, but lost in the Democratic primary election. If elected, she would have made history by being New York's first black female mayor. Instead, she finished in third place (Fernandez, 2005).

As a matter of fact, female candidates' disadvantage in the primary process is something that scholars agree tends to inhibit their chances to get elected (Lawless & Pearson, 2008). In 2013, Christine Quinn, the City Council Speaker, emerged as a candidate for New York City mayor. Although in the beginning of the race her numbers in the polls looked promising, by early September she was trailing Bill de Blasio, who ended up winning the primaries and general election (Lopez-Torregrosa, 2013). Lopez-Torregrosa (2013) in her article "In the City, Sex Isn't Everything," rightly points out that even though many successful women such as Billie Jean King and Gloria Steinem campaigned with Quinn, and various leading women's organizations

were networking and fundraising on her behalf, it still did not make a significant difference. The article concludes with a hypothesis that perhaps “ideology is more important to women than gender” (Lopez-Torregrosa, 2013). So, is it?

Section II: Interviews.

In order to gain a better understanding of the gender dynamics of the electoral politics in New York City, I decided to interview women who either have held, run for, are currently running for, or holding an elective office in New York. In addition to the plethora of literature and research on the subject in general, first-hand input from the individuals who are actually involved in the process is a great supplement to the existing data. This section provides an overview and analysis of the experiences and opinions of female politicians and candidates for office that I interviewed. It starts by briefly summarizing their biographies, political backgrounds, and then will move on to analyzing their responses.

My sample frame included the following potential participants:

- All 13 currently serving female members of the New York City Council including the Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito;
- Public Advocate for the City of New York Letitia James;
- Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer;
- Queens Borough President Melinda Katz;
- Deputy Queens Borough President Melva Miller;
- Former Speaker of the New York City Council and 2013 mayoral candidate Christine Quinn;
- Former Assemblywoman and 2017 NYC mayoral candidate Nicole Malliotakis;
- Former New York City Councilmember, Manhattan Borough President, and 1997 mayoral candidate Ruth Messinger;
- 2017 candidate for New York City Council Ede Fox;
- 2018 candidate for Congress Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Out of the 22 respondents, 5 agreed to participate in my research, resulting in 4 in-person interviews and one phone interview. The length of the interviews varied from 20 minutes to over an hour. The participants interviewed in person were two currently serving New York City Council members – Vanessa Gibson and Karen Koslowitz, former New York City Councilmember, Manhattan Borough President, and 1997 mayoral candidate Ruth Messinger, and 2018 candidate for Congress Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez; 2017 candidate for New York City Council Ede Fox was interviewed via phone.

Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson represents the Bronx's 16th Council District and currently chairs of the Public Safety Committee. Councilwoman Gibson, a New York City native, received her Bachelor's degree in Sociology from the State University of New York, Albany, and the MPA from Baruch College. While in Albany, Gibson secured an internship at the State Assembly which paved the way for her career in politics. She started as an intern working for Assemblywoman Aurelia Greene and went on to work as her legislative aide and district director. In June of 2009, Gibson was elected to the New York State Assembly in a special election to succeed Greene, and Gibson served in that position until August 2013. In the fall of the same year, Gibson ran and got elected to the New York City Council, and in the fall of 2017 she is running for reelection (V.L. Gibson, personal communication, July 19, 2017).

Council Member Karen Koslowitz represents the 29th District of New York City, Queens. Koslowitz, the daughter of immigrants from Poland, was raised in the Bronx, where she graduated from James Monroe High School. She started her career in politics by serving as the Legislative Aide for Congressman Gary Ackerman and then for Council Member Arthur Katzman. She was first elected to the New York City Council in 1991 in a special election and served until 2001, when she had to step down due to term limits. From 2001 until 2009,

Koslowitz served as the Queens Deputy Borough President, and in 2009, she ran for the Council and got elected again to represent the same 29th District. Councilwoman Koslowitz is an incumbent in the 2017 election (K. Koslowitz, personal communication, August 11, 2017).

Ruth Messinger, born and raised in New York, received her Bachelor's degree from Radcliffe College and a Master of Social Work from University of Oklahoma. In 1976, Messinger ran for the New York State Assembly, and lost a close election. Two years later, Messinger ran for and won a seat on the New York City Council, and represented the Upper West Side of Manhattan until 1989. From 1990 until 1997, Ruth Messinger was the Manhattan Borough President, and in 1997 she ran for New York City mayor, and lost to the Republican incumbent Rudy Giuliani. From 1998 until 2016, Messinger was President and CEO of American Jewish World Service (R. Messinger, personal communication, August 8, 2017).

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a Congressional candidate for New York's 14th Congressional District, which covers the Bronx and Queens. A Boston University graduate, Ocasio-Cortez worked at Massachusetts U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy's office. In 2016, she participated in the grass roots efforts on the Bernie Sanders campaign. Without previously holding any local or state elective office, Ocasio-Cortez is running for Congress in 2018, against an incumbent Joseph Crowley, who also heads the Queens County Democratic Committee. She is a part of brandnewcongress.org, an organization that endorses and encourages young new leaders to run for Congress against the establishment (A. Ocasio-Cortez, personal communication, August 8, 2017).

Ede Fox is running for the New York City Council in the 2017 election. Fox received her BA in Anthropology from the University of Michigan and a Master's in Anthropology from UCLA. Fox previously served as the top aide, Legislative and Budget Director to NYC Council

Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, was the First Director of the Economic and Community Development Division of the New York City Council, and was Chief of Staff for Council Member Jumaane D. Williams. In addition, Fox was a board member of Brooklyn Community Board 8, and since 2010 she has served on the Brooklyn Democratic Party County Committee. This is the first time that Ede Fox is seeking an elective office (E. Fox, personal communication, August 18, 2017).

The interviews were structured to allow the participants to provide their input regarding the factors that sociologists and political scientists deem influential when it comes to underrepresentation of women in politics. Among them, political party recruitment and the role of "electoral gatekeepers," sexism and voter bias, family responsibilities, role of women's organizations, the importance of New York City political context, and what role, if any, do these actors and factors play in shaping political ambition of potential women candidates. While the experiences of all five interviewees were similar in some aspects, they differed in others. All of them seemed to agree that electoral gatekeepers play a vital role in politics, especially when it comes to achieving gender parity on the electoral arena. Let us begin by shedding light on this subject.

"In New York there's nothing but gatekeepers," said Ruth Messinger when asked about New York's electoral politics, and specifically, political party recruitment practices (personal communication, August 8, 2017). "The [political] clubs are gatekeepers, the county leaders are huge gatekeepers. There is a set of steps you have to take to run. People can put themselves forward, but often it is with a blessing of a county leader," stated Messinger. When there is vacancy, there is an internal party procedure which, according to Messinger, is designed to support gatekeepers. When asked whether Mrs. Messinger thought that the gatekeepers were

biased against women, she refrained from using the term "biased" per se, but mentioned that the gatekeepers' assumption has always been, "oh, this seat will go to a man." But of course, since Mrs. Messinger has always been highly active in the community, she ended up getting an enormous support from the Democrats when she ran for the City Council, Borough President, and the mayor (R. Messinger, personal communication, August 8, 2017).

Another interviewee, Councilmember Karen Koslowitz, has always been active in her community as well. She and her mother were members of a political club, and at some point, she served as the club's president. When she became a member of the New York City Council for the first time in 1991, it was through a special election. According to what Council Member Koslowitz shared with me during the interview, she was approached by a retiring Councilmember who wanted her to "take his spot," and endorsed her candidacy. "I called all the leaders in the council district, heads of the clubs, and asked them for their support, and it was overwhelming because I had been involved in the club," recalled Koslowitz, "I knew them, and I got everyone's approval" (personal communication, August 11, 2017). According to Councilwoman Koslowitz, gender did not seem to be a relevant factor when it comes to the political parties' candidates' selection and endorsement. Rather, it seemed more about being involved in the community and making connections (K. Koslowitz, personal communication, August 11, 2017).

Councilwoman Gibson's experience dealing with political parties was similarly positive, if not more so. While in Albany, Gibson got introduced to the party leaders, and by the time she ran for the New York City Council she already had name recognition and gained endorsements from the county leaders, unions, and other elected officials. Therefore, she recalled her campaign

for the City Council with positive outlook (V.L. Gibson, personal communication, July 19, 2017).

Ede Fox, on the other hand, despite having been immersed in politics for quite a long time while working for various elected officials, did not seem to have the electoral gatekeepers' support in this race. "I didn't go that route," said Fox, "so my winning is not assured" (personal communication, August 18, 2017). Fox expressed willingness to face the challenges, stating that her campaign experience has been "challenging but rewarding," even without the gatekeepers' "blessing." Although Fox did not specify why she opted not to "go that route," it was clear that she acknowledged that those gatekeepers indeed exist, and play an important role in the elections (E. Fox, personal communication, August 18, 2017).

What do we make of this information? Although the sample of the interviewees may not be large enough to generalize, nonetheless, these women provided valuable insights into the process which merit our attention. First and foremost, these interviews confirm that, as the literature review suggests, the electoral gatekeepers do in fact exist and play a crucial role in electoral politics. They are leaders of the political clubs, as well as county leaders who are in a position to groom a candidate for an open seat, especially in special elections where they get to appoint a candidate to fill a vacancy. All members of the county committees then vote to approve this candidate, but it seems to be just the matter of formality. The next question should be: are women more disadvantaged than men in this scheme of things? The answer, surely, is more complicated than just a simple yes or no. Based on the experiences of the first three respondents, who had all been involved in the community and knew many important political figures, relationships they had established with those individuals gave them the advantage on the electoral arena in a form of the party's support. This shows that it is surely not impossible for

females to get involved, establish the right connections, go through the process, and run with the gatekeepers' blessing. But another question we should ask is whether these women – all greatly qualified to run and serve in office - would have been sought out by the political parties and encouraged to run if they had not already been previously engaged and active in their communities? Is it still easier for men to get recruited and gain party support even though they are not well-known in the community? How many self-made candidates such as Ede Fox, for instance, are out there? And how successful are their campaigns? If fewer women than men find themselves actively engaged in politics, will the gatekeepers make a conscious effort to seek out qualified female candidates and encourage them to run? That remains to be seen, but very slow progress of women's ascendance into politics suggests that, perhaps, current political party recruitment practices are not so favorable to women and more needs to be done to achieve gender parity on the electoral arena.

Several of my questions were aimed at determining the validity of the political ambition theory presented in the literature review and the extent to which external forces shape this ambition as the literature on the subject suggests. Specifically, several articles by Lawless and Fox argue (2010; 2011; 2013) that it is precisely lack of political ambition, more so than other factors, that accounts for low numbers of women candidates, and, consequently, women politicians. For instance, one of their findings is that political ambition is formed early in life, and that boys more frequently than girls are encouraged to get involved in politics by their parents, teachers, etc. As a result, when boys grow up, they are better situated to actively seek political office by virtue of already having been immersed into the world of politics (Lawless & Fox, 2013).

However, it appears that all of my interviewees were introduced to politics one way or the other as they entered adulthood. For example, Councilmember Koslowitz has been involved in political organizations at least in part because she followed her mother's example and advice (K. Koslowitz, personal communication, August 11, 2017). Former Councilwoman and Borough President Ruth Messinger recalls hearing her parents discuss politics at home every day. Although at first Messinger didn't think of politics as a career, she surely had an exposure to what political world entailed (R. Messinger, personal communication, August 8, 2017). Councilwoman Gibson remembers following the news daily and was honored by the Borough President when she was in high school (V.L. Gibson, personal communication, 2017). Ede Fox does not recall being actively encouraged to run for office, but, according to Ms. Fox, she has always been encouraged to speak her mind, which is crucial for someone to develop that much needed political voice and ambition (E. Fox, personal communication, August 18, 2017). With the exception of Karen Koslowitz, my interviewees don't recall being actively encouraged or discouraged from considering a career in politics, but nonetheless, they opted for this career path anyway.

Being able to test the so-called "progressive ambition," i.e. the desire to eventually run for a higher office, proved to be trickier than expected in many regards. Most of the literature on gender in politics emphasizes this traditional progression of one's political career: first, one runs for a local office, then state government, and then Congress. It all seems logical in theory, and many politicians follow this path, but many New York politicians do not. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, for instance, is running for Congress without having previously served in a local or state elective office. When asked specifically about skipping local and state office, she didn't seem to think that those steps were necessary at all, and sounded very confident in moving forward with

her campaign. Further, when asked about perhaps running for New York City mayor some day in the future, she stated that, given local political culture, "it is easier to run for Congress than it would be to run for mayor, especially in New York City" (A. Ocasio-Cortez, personal communication, August 8, 2017). On the one hand, such statement shows an ambition to run for federal government, but at the same time, since being the mayor of New York City is deemed as a more challenging endeavor, it seems like Ocasio-Cortez's ambition does not extend to reaching that goal. Karen Koslowitz decisively stated that she simply does not want to run for any other office since serving on the New York City Council offers a better pay and no travel to Albany would be necessary (personal communication, August 11, 2017). The Councilwoman said she had an opportunity to run for a higher office in the past but she turned it down. Further, when asked about considering running for mayor, Koslowitz said, "I never have, and I never will. It is a thankless job, you are constantly on the go. It never appealed to me." She stated that passing good laws and making difference in the community was why she decided to return to the Council in 2009, and that she was planning to keep doing just that (K. Koslowitz, personal communication, August 11, 2017). This kind of an answer really makes you wonder: maybe it is just about doing what you like? This seems like a personal choice which could hardly be ascribed to lack of ambition.

Councilwoman Gibson's career path seemed to me, at first, a bit unorthodox: isn't a politician supposed to follow the previously described local-state-federal career path? Wouldn't going from State Assembly to the City Council be a step down? Apparently, not in New York. When asked about this seemingly anomalous career move, Councilwoman Gibson listed such factors such as better pay and less travel involved. Further, having served in the State Assembly seems to have given her a great advantage and now, being a member of New York City Council,

she knows how to navigate state and local systems better. In addition, when she joined the Council in 2013, there were several members on the Council who formerly served in the Assembly. In the 2017 race, there are also those who are currently serving in the state government and are now seeking a seat on the New York City Council (McKenna & Tukaj, 2017). In general, Councilwoman Gibson stated that there are many ways to serve, and she is running for reelection again this fall (G.L. Gibson, personal communication, July 19, 2017). Conversely to the rest of the interviewees, and consistent with conventional wisdom, Ede Fox does seem to think that a seat on the City Council is "the smallest accessible position for someone who hasn't held an office before." She stated so in response to my question "why did you decide to run for the City Council?" (E. Fox, personal communication, August 18, 2017). Therefore, here we have a variety of opinions regarding the prestige of being a member of the New York City Council.

Lastly, Ruth Messinger, whose political career definitely stands out, is someone who surely is not lacking political ambition, including the progressive ambition. Messinger told me a brief anecdote about a phone call she once received. It was a wife of an outgoing Assemblymember, who called Messinger to inform her that she was intending to run for her husband's seat. "If she is going to run, I am going to run," thought Mrs. Messinger after that conversation (R. Messinger, personal communication, August 8, 2017). And so she did, but lost by a very small margin, as previously mentioned. Since then, she ran and got elected to serve on the New York City Council, then for 8 years she was Manhattan Borough President, and in 1997 she actually ran for mayor.

The interviewees had an opinion about the role that women's organizations play as well, but it didn't seem to be nearly as important as the role electoral gatekeepers play. For example,

Councilwoman Gibson mentioned the National Organization for Women (NOW), Planned Parenthood, and Eleanor's Legacy. "Women's groups have always been with me," stated Gibson, "I've always been a champion of their cause, we have a lot of common priorities, and so they've always supported me running for office" (V.L. Gibson, personal communication, July 19, 2017). Ede Fox, on the other hand, didn't have such a positive impression about women's organizations as Councilwoman Gibson did. When asked about women's organizations' support during her campaign, Fox stated that, "unfortunately, women's organizations won't endorse you if there are two women in the race" (E. Fox, personal communication, August 18, 2017). She did not get into details as to which organizations exactly she was referring to, however, she surely didn't sound like she was getting any support from them. Ruth Messinger recalled that back in the days, when she ran for the State Assembly, and then the City Council, there were almost no women's organizations; she did, however, receive a lot of endorsements from women politicians, which greatly boosted her campaigns. She did mention that now, some organizations, such as Emily's List, wait too long to endorse a candidate, and end up supporting the front runners only (R. Messinger, personal communication, August 8, 2017). Hence, the literature on the role of women's organizations presented in the literature review seems to paint a more optimistic picture as compared to the actual experiences of the women interviewed. Of course, a larger sample of interviewees is needed to draw more general conclusions on this subject.

As we can see, these interviews helped shed light on various issues discussed in the literature review. Namely, the interviews confirmed the major role political parties play in the recruitment process by selecting and endorsing potential candidates for office. While the interviewees had different experiences with political party gatekeepers – some were endorsed, and others were not, they all acknowledged that party endorsement was crucial for a successful

campaign. The question remains, however, whether women are still disadvantaged due to long standing male domination in the parties. Regarding voter sexism and family obligations, I got various responses; some interviewees believed that those factors are still relevant in 2017, while others didn't. A larger pool of respondents is needed to make a better assessment. Most of the interviewees, however, did mention that specifics of New York City Politics were also at play and in part explained current gender composition on the electoral arena. Let us now take a look at New York City.

Section III: Urban Political Context of New York City.

New York City is the largest city in the United States, home to over 8.5 million people, the city so progressive and so diverse, and yet – so far behind other cities in the U.S. and worldwide in terms of the number of female legislators, and what is even more shocking, the city that has never elected a female mayor. Here is what New York City government looks like in 2017. Bill de Blasio is the mayor, currently serving his first term in office, and running for reelection in the Fall of 2017. Letitia James is the Public Advocate, the first woman of color ever elected to serve in a citywide office in New York City. She manages public relations and serves as the mediator between the government and citizens of NYC. Scott Stringer is the Comptroller, who provides oversight of city agencies' performance and fiscal compliance. All three elected officials who comprise the city's executive branch, are Democratic incumbents seeking a second term in office (www1.nyc.gov). The legislative body is New York City Council, which consists of 51 Council members, elected every four years (council.nyc.gov). Also, the City of New York consists of five boroughs, with each electing a Borough President. Borough presidents perform largely an advisory role.

Now, let's look at the gender composition of the current government. Two out of the three city wide offices – the Mayor and the Comptroller – are occupied by men, and only one – that of the Public Advocate – is held by a female. In the history of NYC (since after consolidation of the five boroughs in 1898) Elizabeth Holtzman was the first and only woman elected to serve as the Comptroller in 1989, and served for one term only. Carol Bellamy was the first and only woman elected to serve as the President of the New York City Council; in 1993, that office was reframed into the New York City Public Advocate, and since was occupied by two women - Betsy Gotbaum and Letitia James. So, in 2017, we have only four women who

have ever been elected to a citywide office in NYC. Also, since the City Council Speaker position was established in 1986, two women - Christine Quinn and Melissa Mark-Viverito – have held this office. Lastly, two out of three New York City Borough Presidents are women – Gale Brewer (Manhattan) and Melinda Katz (Queens). While the number of women who have served or are currently serving as Borough Presidents is slightly more promising than the rest of elective offices listed above, the Borough President is mostly seen as a ceremonial leader who advises the mayors and advocates on behalf of his/her borough (www1.nyc.gov).

Now let us turn to the composition of the New York City Council. While ethnically and racially diverse, out of the 51 members, 13 are women, which constitutes a quarter of this legislative body. In the 2017 elections, there are 10 open seats, and to make matters worse, 5 of those ten are currently occupied by women (McKenna and Tukaj, 2017). Four of those female legislators are term-limited, and one (Julissa Ferreras-Copeland) decided not to run for re-election citing family reasons. While women are running for some of these seats, a few of these races look quite competitive and may result in election of a male candidate. For instance, there seems to be a fierce competition for the District 8 Council seat vacated by the Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito who is term-limited. The competition seems to come down to Diana Ayala, who was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Melissa Mark-Viverito and Assemblymember Robert Rodriguez. While Ayala has been endorsed by Mark-Viverito, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., and the Working Families Party, Rodriguez, who has a great name recognition in the district and who so far has raised the most donations in this race, has secured endorsements of the Bronx Democratic Party Chair Marcos Crespo, Manhattan Democratic Party Leader Keith Wright, former U.S. Congressman Charles Rangel, as well as City Council Member Bill Perkins. So whether the number of female City Council members will increase after the 2017 elections

remains to be seen; however, given how many open seats occupied by women are in this race indicates deem perspectives for those concerned about achieving gender parity in NYC politics.

When asked why we haven't elected a female mayor, the interviewees all said that it was "a good question." Councilwoman Gibson simply stated that the reason for not having a woman mayor was that it was still hard for females to run for office due to the challenges of raising money, getting endorsements, and competing against multiple men in one race (personal communication, July 19, 2017). Ede Fox thought it was still sexism and voter bias that made it difficult for women to run for mayor and win (personal communication, August 18, 2017). According to Councilwoman Koslowitz, the reason was "stigma, just like with the president" (personal communication, August 11, 2017). She mentioned that she supported Christine Quinn when she ran for mayor in 2013. "We had an opportunity to elect a woman. Christine would have made a great mayor. But groups put in a lot of money in negative campaigning, ridiculed Quinn, and, obviously, it had an effect" (K. Koslowitz, personal communication, August 11, 2017). As mentioned earlier, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez thought that running for mayor in New York City would be even more challenging than running for Congress because of peculiarities of NYC's political culture (A. Ocasio-Cortez, personal communication, August 8, 2017). Apparently, being the mayor of the largest city in the U.S. seems comparable to being a president. Ruth Messinger, who did run for New York City mayor, and lost, stated that, "It is infinitely harder, as I discovered, but it is statistically true for voters, to consider a woman for an executive position than a legislative position. There is a huge difference in public mind as to what a woman can do" (personal communication, August 8, 2017). Messinger also added that running for New York City mayor was very expensive, and donors still give preference to men over women. She also pointed out that, although other cities in the United States and abroad have female mayors, it

really comes down to how much power in those cities mayors actually have, and also depends on the government structure (some cities have mayors, while others have city managers). "New Yorkers like to be ruled by men," concluded Messinger (personal communication, August 8, 2017).

Interestingly, based on the data from the 1997 election in which Messinger was a candidate, it appears that the voters were primarily divided along the racial lines, and not gender lines. Few white women (22.9%) and even fewer white men (18.2%) supported Messinger, while the numbers were reversed for the Black voters: 76.5% of males and 80.8% of females voted for Messinger. The Asian support for Messinger was even less pronounced – 10.3% among male and 18% among female voters. The Hispanic males were almost equally split between Messinger and Giuliani, while Hispanic women supported her two to one (Voter News Service, New York City General Election Exit Poll, November 4, 1997). Thus, as we see, especially based on the voting patterns of blacks, whites, and Asians in 1997 mayoral election, race (most likely, along with ideology which usually is reflective of racial division) played a greater role in voters' decision-making process in NYC mayoral election while gender differences were much smaller, though still present.

In an interview conducted in January of 2017 by the New York Daily News, the outgoing City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito expressed concern regarding such a disproportionate under-representation of women in the council as compared to the city's population where women are majority. "It's just bad for us. When you've got such a disparity in this legislative body in this most progressive city, it should be alarming to everybody" (as cited in Durkin, 2017). Mark-Viverito is one of the four female council members who is leaving office at the end of 2017 due to term limits. Mark-Viverito also lamented that electoral

gatekeepers, especially those in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, are overwhelmingly supporting male candidates:

You have certain counties that, in all the positions that have become available as of late, they've only been supporting male candidates. Why is that the case? Is that because that's who's in their circles, and they haven't widened their network and really taken into account serious qualified women? If we are in a male dominated society, the networks are going to be more oriented in that direction (as cited in Durkin, 2017).

What Mark-Viverito is suggesting here is precisely what the literature review has shown; just like it is the case nationwide, political parties in New York seem to favor male candidates and do not seem to make an effort to recruit and support qualified females.

An interview with another powerful figure in New York politics and presumptive republican New York City mayoral candidate Nicole Malliotakis was conducted in July 2017 by Ben Max from the Gotham Gazette. Malliotakis, an Assembly member from Staten Island (as we have seen repeatedly, various members of State Assembly choose to run for an elective office in New York City, and Ms. Malliotakis is one of them), appears to be the only woman in the 2017 mayoral race. She will be the first woman in the past 20 years nominated by a major party, since Ruth Messenger ran as a Democrat and lost in the general election in 1997. Similarly to Mark-Viverito, Malliotakis points out the irony of New York City's anomalous record," In a city that claims to be so progressive, we've never had a female mayor" (as cited in Max, 2017). When asked about potentially making history and becoming New York's first female mayor, Malliotakis noted that while she was proud to be in this race, she didn't want people to vote for her just because she is a woman, but rather, wanted to be judged on her policies (Max, 2017). In such a heavily Democratic city as New York, could a Republican woman really pull off a

victory? As it was evident from analysis of the 1997 mayoral race, the voters were divided not along gender lines, but rather along racial lines and ideology. Her voting record in the State Assembly (she did not support the abortion expansion bill, for example) will likely not appeal to the majority of New Yorkers most of whom are Democrats. While Malliotakis is planning to attack the incumbent Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio on his policies (failure to effectively deal with homelessness, for example), whether or not her campaign will be effective remains to be seen (Max, 2017).

Thus, as we can see, many factors are at play when it comes to underrepresentation of women in New York City elective offices. First of all, the factors that explain women's slow ascension into politics across the United States are also relevant in New York City. Political party recruitment and family obligations do matter, and contribute to decreasing women's political ambition to run for office. But also, there appears to be this notion that New York City is not an ordinary American city – it is the largest city in the country, a city that is known in the entire world. It is the city where the United Nations Headquarters are located, the city where the stock exchange draws the attention of the entire world every day. It is the city where immigrants used to come and settle, and many are still arriving from all over the world to achieve the American dream. It is not surprising then, that many view New York City as a country within a country, in a way, and the mayor of New York, then, is perceived as someone close to being a president.

Consider how popular it is for former members of New York State Assembly to run for an elective office in New York City. Some, surely, run for Congress, as the traditional pattern of a politician's career would suggest; others, on the other hand, run to join the New York City Council or even become the mayor, positions that apparently are more appealing and prestigious

than those in the U.S. House of Representatives. Even Hillary Clinton was rumored to run for NYC mayor after her defeat in the 2016 presidential election (Cillizza, 2017). This shows how important and prestigious mayor's office in NYC actually is. But this competition for prestige seems to put potential female candidates for office in a disadvantaged position in that not only do they have to compete against men who are favored by the political parties and seem to be less constrained when it comes to family obligations; but also, they have to compete in the city where every single elective office is much more desirable and sought after than anywhere else in the country. Just like we still haven't elected a woman president, we haven't elected a female New York mayor. Just like there has only been one black U.S president, there has been one black New York mayor. If anything, New York City voters seem to mirror the voting behavior of the entire U.S. population when it comes to electing an executive. Were Ruth Messinger and Karen Koslowitz right? Do New Yorkers still like to be ruled by white men and have a hard time imagining a female executive? Perhaps. Maybe soon, we will be able to actually lead by example, and show the world what representation in politics should really look like. For now, however, we might as well just look at the rest of the world which is way ahead of the United States in terms of achieving gender parity in politics. Who knows, maybe we could actually learn something.

Conclusion and Discussion.

So, why are there still so few women occupying elective offices in America? Why, despite the fact that women are now more active in politics than before, turn out to vote at higher rates than men, and more and more women have successful careers in fields previously occupied by men such as business, law, and education? Further, why New York City, arguably the most progressive and inclusive city in the country, has never elected a female mayor, when other large and small cities across the U.S. and worldwide, have? As we have seen, a lot of explanations have been proposed and tested by sociologists and political scientists to account for women's slow ascension into politics. What this thesis was trying to accomplish was to review the most plausible theories of women's underrepresentation in politics in the United States and in New York City, identify which ones still have merit in the 21st century, and supplement this information with first-hand experiences of women who actually ran for and/or served in office. While the vast literature on the subject of women in politics is a great source of information, the interviews conducted with women who have dealt with the realities of political campaigns and/or serving in office have provided a great value to this research.

First, let us address the first question that this thesis has tried to answer: why are there still so few women in politics in the United States? One approach to answering this question is provided by supply theory. That is, why do women simply fail to emerge as candidates? As we have seen, that approach has produced mixed results. While there are more women now than a couple of decades ago who run for office at all levels of governments, the world of politics is still male dominated. There are still more men than women in most races, and the electoral gatekeepers still do not seem to make an effort to recruit more women. As is evident based on the literature reviewed in this thesis as well as the interviews, electoral gatekeepers are still

crucial when it comes to selecting candidates, encouraging them to run, endorsing their campaigns, and providing financial support. Without their support, women are less likely to develop political ambition to run for office and actually win. While the experiences of women interviewed for this project differed in terms of receiving support from their parties, all of them unequivocally acknowledged political parties' importance. It is clear that political parties have to make a conscious effort to recruit more women to run for office; without their support, achieving gender parity in the world of politics will take longer.

When it comes to traditional gender roles and family obligations, many women from the studies discussed in this thesis cite unequal sharing of responsibilities as one of the reasons why they either don't ever consider a career in politics, delay it until their children have grown up, or are reluctant to seek a higher office and relocate to a state capital or Washington, D.C. Interestingly, when asked directly whether they thought family responsibilities played a role in women's slow integration into the political world, most of my interviewees did not believe it was the case. However, during the course of the interviews most of them acknowledged in more subtle ways that it was harder for women as compared to men to juggle careers and child-care responsibilities. Perhaps, it was just difficult to say it out loud that in 2017 these issues still persist. While numerous women's organizations are now working to mitigate the gender gap in the American politics, family responsibilities still seem to influence women's decision-making regarding getting involved in politics.

While the process of achieving gender parity in politics is happening very slowly across the country, New York State as well as the City of New York seem to be far behind. Very few towns in the Empire State have female mayors, and New York City has never had a woman mayor. As we have seen, there have been a few female candidates running for mayor, but they

were usually the only women in their respective races, and none of them actually got elected. As mentioned earlier, many women are reluctant to engage in New York City politics due to the nature of NYC's political world. City level positions in NYC appear to be more desirable than in any other ordinary city; even state legislators choose to run for New York City Council. Normally, it would be considered a step down; in New York, it is perceived as running for a more prestigious office even though it is a local one.

Surely, more research is needed to explain why women remain a minority in politics despite having achieved successful careers and could potentially make excellent elected officials. There doesn't seem to be a clear answer as to what the reason is. Rather, it is a combination of factors that prevent women from running and getting elected. First of all, political parties are very well developed in the United States, and two-party system has become deeply embedded into our political system; as a result, a candidate has to go through a process of getting their party's "blessing" to be able to have a successful campaign. In other countries, it may not necessarily be the case, which may explain why U.S. is lagging in terms of women politicians. Also, other countries may have better child-care arrangements which free up women to devote more time to politics. Lastly, in the U.S elections – federal or local – voters still seem to be voting along race lines and not paying much attention to candidates' gender. Historically, it so happened that political parties have strong platforms which cater to racial and ethnic groups more so than women versus men. This thesis is just a small but an important contribution to the scholarship on the subject of women in politics. Even if unable to provide a definitive answer to the problem, we should still draw attention to it and make it a topic that merits to be discussed. For identifying and acknowledging the problem is the first step to its solution.

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