Entering the Mayor's Office:

Women's Decisions to Run for Municipal Office

Susan J. Carroll
Rutgers University
scarroll@rci.rutgers.edu

and

Kira Sanbonmatsu
Rutgers University
sanbon@rci.rutgers.edu

Abstract: We investigate the routes that women take to the mayor's office in big cities (with populations of 30,000 and above) using the 2008 CAWP Mayoral Recruitment Study. Although we often assume that women fare well in local politics, we find that women's mayoral officeholding in large cities has not increased. Using survey data, we investigate the backgrounds of women mayors and their decisions to seek municipal office.

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Surprisingly little research has focused on women serving in local elective offices in the United States (for reviews, see Flammang 1997; MacManus and Bullock 1993). Even less research has investigated elected women serving in executive positions at this level of government. Moreover, much of what we know about women elected officials at the local level is based on studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Stewart 1980; Johnson and Carroll 1978; Carroll and Strimling 1981; Karnig and Walter 1976; Karnig and Welch 1979; Welch and Karnig 1979; Merritt 1977; Saltzstein 1986; MacManus 1981). Recent research is relatively scarce (although see Deckman 2006 and 2007; Smith, Reingold, and Owens 2009; Weikart et al. 2006).

There are several possible explanations for the paucity of research on women elected officials at the local level. First, in recent years as more women have entered Congress and even sought the presidency, scholars of women and politics have increasingly shifted their focus away from state and local politics, where traditionally there were more women officials, to the seemingly more glamorous arena of national politics.

Second, studying women in local politics has proven to be very difficult, especially given the vast number of municipalities and localities in the United States and the strong disciplinary preference for research based on representative samples with findings that are generalizable beyond the boundaries of the specific cities studied. Despite the potential for large "Ns" suitable for statistical analysis, research design issues have proven to be particularly complex. For example, with more than 35,000 municipal and township governments across the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2002) which hold elections in different months and years, nothing

approaching a comprehensive national list of municipal officials exists, much less a list of all women serving in municipal offices. Consequently, the problems involved in trying to draw a representative sample of women municipal officials that will produce findings generalizable for the country as a whole are daunting.

Third, there seems to be a widespread assumption that women are better represented in local politics than in state and national politics and consequently that the major barriers to increasing women's representation exist primarily at higher levels of office. Because the United States has so many municipalities and thus thousands of local council and mayoral positions nationwide, it is true, as Julie Dolan, Melissa Deckman, and Michele L. Swers suggest, that "Today, women are more likely to serve at the local level of government than at the state or national level" (2007: 187). There are many more officeholding opportunities and thus undoubtedly many more women serving in elective office at local than at state and national levels. Moreover, gender differences on a variety of indicators tend to be smaller when the focus is on local politics, suggesting greater parity between women and men at this level. For example, although public opinion surveys typically reveal a gender gap in interest in national politics with women less interested than men, women citizens are as interested as men in local politics (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001: 102). Moreover, while there is an ambition gap among citizens with women less interested in officeholding than men (including mayoral office), women express more interest than men in serving on school board, and they express the same level of interest as men in serving in local office (Lawless and Fox 2005: 49). Lawless and Fox also found women citizens were more likely than men to have sought local office (2005: 41).

Yet, in terms of proportions, it is not clear that women fare better at the local level than at other levels of officeholding. While comprehensive, recent data are lacking, the existing evidence is mixed at best. In 2001, the most recent year for which data are available, women were 25% of elected county commissioners and 39% of elected and appointed school board members (MacManus, Bullock, Padgett, and Penberthy 2005: 12), meaning that the proportions of school board members and county commissioners who were women in that year was greater than the 22.4% of state legislators and 13.6% of members of Congress who were women (CAWP 2010). However, women, who constituted 22.3% of elected city council members in 2001 (Nelson 2002), were no better represented on city councils that year than they were in state legislatures. Moreover, in 2010 women are only 17.6% of mayors of cities with populations of 30,000 and above, compared with 24.4% of all state legislators and 16.8% of all members of Congress (CAWP 2010). Thus, women currently constitute a notably smaller share of big city mayors than of state legislators and are only marginally better represented among big city mayors than they are among members of Congress.

Not only do the existing data suggest that women are not uniformly better represented at the local level, but also that, at least among big city mayors where data are available, the proportion of women decreases as city size increases. While 17.6% of cities with populations over 30,000 had women mayors as of January 2010, women were mayors of only 14.5% of the 249 cities with populations over 100,000 and 7.0% of the 100 largest cities (CAWP 2010).

Moreover, the proportion of women mayors of large cities has not grown over the past two decades (see Figure 1). Proportionately, women hold only slightly more positions as mayors of cities with populations over 30,000 in 2010 than they did in 1990, and today there are fewer

women mayors of these cities than in the late-1990s and early 2000s. Similar trends are also evident in larger cities. For example, in 2000 more women served as mayors of cities with populations over 100,000 (17.5%) and as mayors of the 100 largest cities (12.0%) than serve in these positions in 2010 (CAWP 2000). These statistics suggest that more research is needed to help us understand why women remain so poorly represented among mayors of big cities.

[Figure 1 about here]

Very few of the past studies of women in local elective offices have focused on the factors that affect women's decisions to run for these offices. Researchers have more frequently studied the relationship between the representation of women in local office (especially local council) and various aggregate indicators such as electoral arrangements (e.g., at-large versus district elections), council size, region, and community characteristics (e.g., Smith, Reingold, and Owens 2009; Troustine and Valdini 2008; Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Bullock and MacManus 1990; Fleischmann and Stein, 1987; Welch and Karnig 1979; Karnig and Walter 1976). Similarly, several studies have focused on the impact of women local elected officials on public policy, public attitudes, or political opportunities for other women (Flammang 1985; Beck 2001; Tolleson Rinehart 2001; Saltzstein 1986; MacManus 1981; Weikart et al. 2006). In contrast, the recruitment of women to run for local elective offices and the factors that facilitate and impede their entry into local office have received less research attention, especially in recent years (although see Johnson and Carroll 1978; Carroll and Strimling 1981; MacManus 1992; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Deckman 2007; Knowles 2008).

In this paper we use data from the 2008 CAWP Mayoral Recruitment Study to help address the gap in our knowledge about the recruitment of women who serve as local elected

officials, comparing the factors that affect the entry of women into local office with what we know from previous research about the recruitment of women for political office more generally. We examine the women who are the chief executives of their local governments in cities with populations 30,000 and above, focusing on their backgrounds and their decisions to run for local office. By analyzing the factors that contributed to their decisions to run, we can better understand why, despite the geographic proximity of city hall to their homes and everyday lives, women continue to be underrepresented in local politics.

Methodology

We analyze data from the 2008 CAWP Mayoral Recruitment Study conducted by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) about the factors that affect mayors' entry into office. This study was funded in large part by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation with matching funds from the Susie Tompkins Buell Foundation, Wendy McKenzie, and other donors.

The 2008 CAWP Mayoral Recruitment Study, based on a survey of the mayors of big cities (populations 30,000 and above), examines those women who have been successful—officeholders—in order to understand how women make the initial decision to seek municipal office and how they reach the mayor's office. Data were gathered through a survey instrument that consisted primarily of questions concerning the decision to seek office, previous political experience, and personal background.[1]

[1] See the Appendix for more details about the methodology. At the same time that we conducted the mayor survey, we conducted a parallel survey of state legislators (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009).

We sent the survey to the universe of women mayors (N=189) and a random sample of an equal number of male mayors (N=189).[2] A total of 182 mayors completed the survey for an overall response rate of 48.2%.[3] A majority of respondents completed the mail version of the survey although respondents also had the option of filling out the survey online. Since we surveyed the universe of women and more than half of them responded, we are confident that our women respondents are reflective of the population of women mayors. However, because we drew a random sample of male mayors, our response rate is somewhat lower for the men, and our resulting N is not large, we are more cautious in drawing inferences about male mayors.[4]

Who Are Women Mayors?

We begin our analysis with a little background on women mayors. As noted above, there is an inverse relationship between proportion of women mayors and city size (beyond 30,000), and corresponding to this relationship, the women mayors who responded to our survey represent smaller cities than do the male respondents. The average population size for women mayors is 80,000 compared with 98,000 for men mayors.

Most mayors, both women and men, became mayor through direct popular election (64.3% of women and 68.7% of men). A large majority of these popularly elected mayors were selected through nonpartisan elections (85.5% of women and 79.0% of men). Fewer mayors, but more women than men (31.6% compared with 22.9%), became mayor after being elected to the

[2] We obtained the mayors' names and contact information from the U.S. Conference of Mayors.
[3] The response rate was higher among women mayors (52.4%) than among men mayors (43.9%).
[4] A total of 955 male mayors of cities with populations 30,000 and above served at the time of our study. We randomly selected 20% of the men to survey (N=189).

council and then selected to serve as mayor by the other council members.[5] A handful of mayors reached the office through appointment to fill a vacancy (1% of women and 6% of men).

Most of the mayors in our study are non-Hispanic whites (86.7% of women and 91.5% of men) with African-Americans constituting 8.2% of women and 2.4% of men. The remaining 5.1% of women and 6.1% of men identify as Latino, Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian, or mixed-race.

Scholars have typically found gender differences in family situations among elected officials with women less likely than men to be married and to have young children (e.g., Carroll and Strimling 1983; Johnson and Carroll 1978; Carroll 1989). Consistent with previous research, the women mayors in our study were less likely than men mayors to be married or living as married (73.5% of women compared with 92.7% of men) and more likely to be divorced/ separated (12.2% of women and 4.9% of men) or widowed (9.2% of women and 1.2% of men). Women mayors also were slightly less likely to have one or more children under the age of eighteen (20.6% of women compared with 24.4% of men), including a child under the age of six (3.1% of women mayors compared with 6.1% of men).[6]

Previous research has found that women public officials, compared with their male counterparts, tend to come more often from female-dominated professions and less often from male-dominated professions. This research also has found that women officeholders tend to be well educated although they are less likely than their male colleagues to have law degrees (e.g., Carroll and Strimling 1983; MacManus and Bullock 1995). We find similar patterns in the occupational and educational backgrounds of the mayors in our study (Table 1). Slightly fewer

[5] 3.1% of women mayors and 2.4% of men listed "other" to describe their selection as mayor.

women than men are lawyers (7.4% of women compared with 12.8% of men). Women are notably more likely than men to be teachers (21.1% of women compared with 6.4% of men), but less likely to hail from business-related occupations. Both the women and men are highly educated, with about four-fifths of respondents reporting at least a college degree (78.1% of women and 80.3% of men). Similarly, women are as likely as the men to hold Masters degrees (26.4% of women and 24.7% of men). However, consistent with previous research and the fact that women mayors are less likely than men mayors to be attorneys, women are slightly less likely than men to have a law degree (8.8% compared to 12.4%).

[Table 1 about here]

Just as women mayors bring strong occupational and educational backgrounds to their mayoral positions, so too do they bring civic involvement and political experience. Undoubtedly, their civic and political activity provided both credentials and networks that were helpful in their pursuit of office.

As previous research has found for women officials at various levels of government (e.g., Johnson and Carroll 1978; Carroll and Strimling 1983), women mayors are joiners. Table 2 makes clear that ties between women mayors and women's organizations not only are quite common, but also generally predate women's election to office. Prior to seeking a municipal office, about a third of women mayors were members of the League of Women Voters (LWV), and half belonged to a women's civic organization other than LWV (Table 2). More than one-third were members of a women's business or professional group, and more than one-fifth had joined a feminist organization. Notable proportions also belonged to a sorority or a women's

[6] This difference does not appear to be a result of age differences. The women and men mayors in our study were similar in age (with an average age of 57 for women and 59 for men).

PAC. Interestingly, not a single woman mayor reported that she was a member of a conservative women's political organization before running for office. The women's organization women most commonly joined after running for office was, not surprisingly, an organization of women public officials, but a notable number also joined the LWV after running the first time.

[Table 2 about here]

Women mayors' pre-officeholding involvement was not limited to women's organizations. Rather, mayors were active in a wide range of civic organizations before they sought elective municipal office the first time (Table 3). Many women mayors–about one-fourth--not only joined women's organizations, but also reported they were "very active" in those organizations. Among women mayors, the most common non-women's organization in which respondents were "very active" was a church-related or other religious group, with almost one-third of women mayors reporting active involvement in such a group. About one-quarter of women mayors were very active in a children's or youth organization, a service organization such as the Rotary Club, or a business or professional group. Gender differences in organizational involvement are apparent. Compared with men mayors, women were much more likely to have been active not only in women's organizations, but also in religious organizations and organizations focused on children and youth.

[Table 3 about here]

In addition to their involvement in civic organizations, some women mayors were also involved in partisan politics before seeking municipal office the first time. A clear majority of women mayors identify as Democrats (59.0%) compared with about half of the men (49.4%).

Conversely, fewer women (30.5%) than men (39.5%) are Republicans.[7] Among mayors who identify with one of the two major parties, about one-quarter were members of their local party committee prior to running for municipal office the first time (29.4% of women and 25.0% of men), with some mayors also reporting committee positions and experience as a delegate to a party convention (Table 4).

[Table 4 about here]

More common than party activity or civic activity was campaign activity prior to seeking municipal office. A majority of mayors had campaign experience, with more women than men reporting that they had worked on a campaign (62.6% of women and 57.8% of men). Some mayors had previously worked on the staff of a public official, though this was not common. Fewer female mayors than male mayors worked on the staff of a public official (14.1% of women and 18.1% of men).

Most women and men mayors held at least one elective or appointive position prior to serving as mayor, with women somewhat more likely than men to have done so (86.3% of women and 72.0% of men). There were some modest differences in the types of offices that served as the starting point in the political careers of women and men. Among those who had served in a public position prior to serving as mayor, fewer women--about two-fifths-- than men--about one half--reported that their first office had been a seat on the city council (see Table 5). While women were slightly less likely to have served on council, they were somewhat more likely than men to have served on a local or county board or commission (35.4% of women compared to 27.8% of men) as their first office.

[7] About 11% of both women and men mayors reported their party affiliation as Independent or other.

[Table 5 about here]

Consistent with the findings of other research on women elected officials at various levels of office (e.g., Merritt 1977; Carroll and Strimling 1983; Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009), the women in this study thus appear on almost every measure of civic and political involvement to have had as much or more experience than their male counterparts before becoming mayors. The only exception is for working on the staff of an elected official--an experience women were slightly less likely to have had. But women were just as likely or more likely than men to have been active in civic organizations and political parties before seeking municipal office and to have held a previous elective or appointive position before becoming mayor. And women mayors were much more likely than men mayors to have worked on political campaigns before running for municipal office themselves.

The Initial Decision to Run: Sources of Encouragement and Discouragement

We focus our analysis in this section and the next on mayors' decisions to run for municipal office the first time, rather than specifically on their decisions to seek the position of mayor. Not all mayors were popularly elected to the mayoralty, and many mayors had run for council or other local offices such as school board before being selected either by the public or their fellow council members as mayor. Because we are most interested in how people decide to run for office in the first place, we chose to focus the bulk of our survey questions on the mayors' first serious foray into electoral politics at the municipal level. For most of the mayors in our study--and for more of the women than men (74.5% compared to 65.1%)--the very first office

they sought was a municipal council position. Nevertheless, a minority (19.4% of women and 26.5% of men) ran for mayor as their first office.

Recent research has found that women candidates frequently need encouragement before running for office (Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001), but that potential female candidates may be less likely than potential male candidates to receive such encouragement (Sanbonmatsu 2006; Lawless and Fox 2010). Following on the work of Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell (2001) about state legislative candidates' decisions to run, we asked mayors whether the decision to seek municipal office the first time was entirely their idea, whether they had not seriously thought about becoming a candidate until someone else suggested it, or whether it was a combination of their thinking and the suggestion of someone else.

We call those who ran because of encouragement "pure recruits": they had not seriously thought about becoming a candidate until someone else suggested it. The "pure recruit" response was the most common response among women; 43.3% of women mayors were pure recruits (Table 6). One-third of women mayors were self-starters who decided to seek municipal office entirely on their own, and 23.7% of women mayors reported that their decision was a combination of their thinking and the influence of someone else.

In contrast to women, men mayors were less likely to be pure recruits. Men were about evenly divided across these three response categories, with about one-third of men mayors falling into the pure recruit category, one-third into the self-starter category, and one-third into the mixed category.

[Table 6 about here]

Interestingly, our findings about women mayors depart to some extent from findings we have reported elsewhere for women state legislators. We found that women state legislators who ran for the legislature as their first elective office were more likely to be recruited to run rather than deciding to do so on their own. By more than a 2 to 1 margin, women legislators were pure recruits rather than self-starters (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2009). Thus, fewer women mayors than legislators ran because they were recruited (43.3% of mayors compared with 56.5% of legislators). And more women mayors than legislators were self-starters (33.0% of mayors and 21.8% of legislators).

We asked those mayors who ran at least in part because they received encouragement about the person who was most influential in encouraging them. The largest proportion of mayors of both genders were recruited by a friend, co-worker, or acquaintance (32.3% of women compared with 44.4% of men) (see Table 7). The next largest proportion of both women and men were recruited by an elected or appointed official (29.0% of women and 24.1% of men), followed by a spouse or partner (19.4% of women and 11.1% of men). Party officials and organizations—including women's organizations—were less frequently mentioned. Thus, it is personal sources--friends, co-workers, spouses--and not formal actors who appear to have been most important in encouraging women's candidacies.[8]

[Table 7 about here]

Although very few women mayors identified a women's organization as the most influential source of encouragement, women's organizations do play a role in women's candidacies. In response to a separate question, nearly one-fifth of women mayors (19.4%) said

[8] In contrast, formal political actors such as party leaders and elected officials are much more likely to be the most influential sources of recruitment of state legislators to their first elective office (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh

that a women's organization actively encouraged them the first time they ran for municipal office.

Potential candidates often confront a range of hurdles in their decision-making about candidacy. One of those hurdles is overcoming any attempts by others to discourage one's candidacy. Scholarship on recruitment to public office has generally overlooked what could be called "negative recruitment" (but see Niven 2006). However, we find the officeholders in our study frequently ran despite efforts to dissuade them from doing so. A substantial proportion of mayors of large cities-- 40.2% of women mayors and 39.0% of men mayors—reported that someone tried to discourage them when they were making the decision to seek elective office the very first time.

Interestingly, however, the sources of discouragement were more often personal than political. Among those who encountered efforts to discourage their candidacies, a friend, co-worker, or acquaintance was the most common (44.7% of women and 53.1% of men) source of discouragement (see Table 8). Women and men were about equally likely to encounter discouragement from a spouse/partner (7.9% of women and 9.4% of men), but women mayors were more likely than men to face resistance from other family members (18.4% of women compared with 3.1% of men). Although attempts by political sources to dissuade mayors from running for municipal office the first time were somewhat less common than attempts by personal sources, nevertheless notable proportions of mayors were discouraged from running for office the first time by an elected or appointed official (26.3% of women and 37.5% of men). Women were less likely than men to encounter negative recruitment efforts by parties (7.9% of

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2009).

women compared with 18.8% of men), while women and men were equally likely to have been discouraged by a member of an organization (18.4% of women compared with 18.8% of men).

[Table 8 about here]

Because most mayoral contests are nonpartisan, political parties do not emerge in our study as particularly important in understanding the pathway to the mayor's office. Only 20.2% of women mayors and 15.8% of men mayors said that party leaders actively sought them out and encouraged them to run for municipal office the first time. Only about one-quarter of women and men mayors rated the party as very or somewhat active in recruiting municipal candidates in their area.

More than one-third of women and men (about 37%) reported that party leaders generally supported their candidacy the first time they sought municipal office, with almost no respondents reporting opposition. Nearly one-fifth of women (19.1%) and 14.5% of men said that they faced neutral or divided party leaders in that first race. Meanwhile, nearly half of women and men mayors reported that because they ran in a nonpartisan election, the question of party leader support was not applicable to how they reached their decision to seek municipal office the first time (42.7% of women and 46.1% of men).

The Initial Decision to Run: An Assessment of Important Influences

To develop an overall assessment of the factors most important in influencing the initial decision to run for office, we asked mayors to rate thirteen items as very important, somewhat important, not important, or not applicable to their decisions to run for municipal office the first time. The proportions of women and men evaluating each factor as "very important" to their

initial decisions to seek municipal office are presented in Table 9.

[Table 9 about here]

Two observations are immediately apparent. First, family and personal considerations (as opposed to political considerations) emerge as the factors that are important for the largest proportions of both women and men. Second, women and men mayors are for the most part quite similar in how they evaluate the majority of the factors. Nevertheless, a few interesting gender differences are apparent.

Two of the three top factors for women are the approval of their spouse or partner and the fact that their children were old enough that they felt comfortable not being home as much. About three-fourths of women rated spousal support and almost three-fifths rated having older children as very important to their decisions to run. The only other factor ranked very important by a majority of the women mayors was the realization that they were just as capable of holding office as most officeholders (Table 9).

Even more men mayors than women mayors (84.3% compared to 72.2%) rated spousal approval as very important. However, this gender difference is due to the fact that men were notably more likely than women to be married. Among those women and men who were married at the time of our survey, almost all said that spousal support was very important.

Women were more likely than men to rate "my children being old enough for me to feel comfortable not being home as much" as very important to their decisions to run although almost half the men did so. As noted earlier, men mayors were more likely than women mayors to have young children, and taken together, these two findings suggest that young children pose more of a constraint for women than for men. This pattern is consistent with the findings of earlier

research on women officeholders (e.g., Strimling and Carroll 1983; Carroll 1989) and suggests that even at the local level where officials do not have to relocate or live apart from their families as state and federal officeholders sometimes do, the responsibilities of parenting may more often deter women than men from seeking office--at least until their children are older and their parenting responsibilities have diminished.

Almost three-fourths of women mayors rated the realization that they were just as capable of holding office as most officeholders very important to their decisions to run (Table 9). Although a majority of men also rated this factor very important, a notable gender gap nevertheless is evident on this factor, suggesting that having sufficient self-confidence was critical to more women than men.

Another gender difference apparent in Table 9 is consistent with this finding that self-confidence is particularly critical to women's decisions to run. Although less than a quarter of all women rated it as "very important," women were much more likely than men to say that having sufficient prior political experience was a key factor in their decision to run. Obtaining more political experience might well be one way women bolstered their confidence before running for municipal office. Women not only were more likely to rate prior political experience as important, but also as reported earlier in this paper, women actually acquired more political experience than men before seeking municipal office for the first time.

Support for the conclusion that bolstering self-confidence is more important for women than men is also provided by another finding from our study–that more women than men (49% of women compared with 33.3% of men) reported attending a campaign training or workshop. Although very few women and no men rate their participation in such training as "very

important" to their decisions to run (Table 9), nevertheless campaign training sessions and workshops may help build women's political confidence.

Several other factors were mentioned by sizable proportions of mayors as very important to their decisions to seek municipal office the first time. About half of both women and men rated as very important having an occupation that would allow them sufficient time and flexibility to hold office, and about two-fifths said that being able to handle public scrutiny was critical to their decisions. Men more often gave weight to both of these factors, but gender differences were small.

Gender differences were slightly larger on an item asking about concern over one or two particular public policy issues, with women more often than men (44.3% compared to 32.5%) rating this as very important to their decisions to run for municipal office the first time. In contrast, women less often than men pointed to a longstanding desire to be involved in politics as the reason they sought their current office. As Table 9 shows, while relatively few women or men rated a longstanding desire to run for office a very important consideration in their decision to run for municipal office the first time, women were less likely to do so than men. Thus, public policy concerns seem a more important factor, and long-term desire to run a less important factor, motivating the candidacies of women than men.

A final factor that was critical for sizable proportions of both women and men was "having sufficient financial resources to conduct a viable campaign." There were no gender differences on this item with about one-third of mayors of both genders rating money as very important in their decision to run for municipal office for the first time (Table 9).

Although women were not more likely than men to view having sufficient financial

resources as critical to their initial decision to run, they were more likely to think that raising money is harder for women than for men (Figure 2). A majority of women mayors (52%) agreed that it is more difficult for women than men to raise funds, compared with only 21.7% of the men. In contrast, only 48% of the women responded that it is equally hard for women and men to raise money, compared with an overwhelming majority (75.9%) of the men. Thus, even though having sufficient financial resources does not appear to weigh more heavily in women's than men's decisions to run for local office, nevertheless a majority of women mayors do not perceive an equal playing field when it comes to money. When we asked those women who said it is harder for women candidates to raise funds about the most important reason why, 36% said that women are less comfortable asking for money for themselves, 30% reported that women do not have the same networks, and 18% replied that women raise money in smaller denominations.

[Figure 2 about here]

The Decision to Seek the Mayor's Office

So far our analysis has focused on mayors' decisions to run for their very first office at the municipal level regardless of what that office might have been. However, we also wanted to learn more about what motivated these mayors specifically to seek the office of mayor. Consequently, we asked mayors to choose from a closed-ended list of responses to the question, "Other than your desire to serve the public, what was the single most important reason that you decided to seek the municipal office you now hold?" Their responses are presented in Table 10.

[Table 10 about here]

Women's anecdotal stories about how and why they ran for local office often focus on their desire to bring about a change in public policy. For example, Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), currently the most senior woman in the U.S. Senate, was first compelled to run for city council because of her opposition to the construction of a 16-lane highway in ethnic neighborhoods in Baltimore. U.S. Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-MN) first decided to run for her first office, a city council position, when her daughter was injured on a poorly maintained park slide and the local government failed to repair the playground equipment. Former Congresswoman Karen Thurman (D-FL) was a schoolteacher who decided to run for the city council after she organized her students to protest the council's proposal to close a public beach (Office of History and Preservation 2006: 737, 872, 876).

Our data suggest that stories like these are not anomalies. As we found in the previous section, women mayors often rated their concern over specific policy issues as very important in their decision to seek their very first municipal office and were more likely than men to do so. The data in Table 10 suggest that public policy considerations also played a critical role in motivating many women to seek mayoral office. Both women and men chose "my concern about one or more specific public policy issues" more frequently than any other response when asked to specify their most important reason for seeking their current office. However, this was a much more common response for women than men (41.2% of women compared with 26.8% for men). Thus, many women mayors were motivated by a desire to change public policy, and public policy played a much larger role in women's than men's decisions to seek office.

Meanwhile, women mayors were much less likely than men mayors to choose "my longstanding desire to be involved in politics" (9.3% of women compared with 19.5% of men) as

the major reason they sought their current office. This finding also parallels the gender difference we found when we asked mayors to rate the importance of this factor in their decisions to seek their very first municipal-level office.

Notable proportions of women and men also reported that they sought their current office primarily because of a "desire to change the way government works" and "dissatisfaction with the incumbent." However, the proportions of women and men specifying these reasons were very similar. Few women or men (only about 6% of each) said that they sought the office of mayor primarily because a party leader or elected official recruited them.

Conclusion

Recent scholarship on women in politics has returned to the theme of the obstacles that remain for women candidates. In this paper, we have documented the pathways that women take to one office—the mayor's office—in order to shed light on the situation of women in municipal office more generally. While we often assume that women are better represented at the local level than they are in state-level positions, we have seen that it remains unusual for women to serve as mayors of large cities. Indeed, fewer women serve in such positions today than in the 1990s. Using survey data from the 2008 CAWP Mayoral Recruitment Study, we have shown that the path to the mayor's office is somewhat different for women compared with men. Women mayors lead cities that are smaller than the cities led by men. Women are less likely to have sought the mayor's office as their first municipal office. And women are less likely than men to become mayor through popular election and more likely to have achieved their positions through selection by their colleagues on the city council. These gender differences among mayors may

reflect challenges that women face in achieving executive positions compared with legislative positions. Public officials, voters, and interest groups may be less accustomed to women serving in executive roles. With our data, we cannot determine if the dearth of women mayors stems more from a lack of support for women mayoral candidates or a decision of women to focus their efforts on seeking other public positions.

Our data does, however, speak to the considerations and backgrounds that lead to the mayor's office. Our findings on the backgrounds of mayors are very consistent with the findings of past research on women officeholders at various levels of government. Women mayors are highly educated but less likely than men mayors to be attorneys and have law degrees. Before running for municipal office the first time, women mayors were very active in both women's and other civic organizations. On most measures women had as much or more political experience than men mayors, with most having worked on campaigns for other candidates and having held at least one elective or appointive position prior to serving as mayor.

Consistent with the findings of research on state legislators, women in our study were more likely than men to be "pure recruits"--candidates who had not seriously thought about running for their first municipal office until someone else suggested it. About two-fifths of the women mayors were pure recruits. However, in a departure from research on state legislators that found that women were less likely than men to be self-starters, we found women mayors just as likely as men mayors to have decided on their own without outside encouragement to run for their first municipal office. About one-third of women were self-starters--fewer than the number who were pure recruits, but a sizable number nevertheless.

Two findings stand out in our analysis of the various factors that affect women's decisions to run for local office. First, actors in their personal lives are clearly more critical in affecting women's decisions to run at this level than are political actors and considerations. Friends, co-workers, spouses, and other family members were important sources of encouragement and discouragement for women's candidacies. Similarly two of the top three factors affecting women's decisions to seek municipal office were the approval of their spouse and the fact that their children were old enough that they felt comfortable not being home as much. Political considerations--such as public scrutiny, financial resources, political experience, party support--were rated as important by notably smaller proportions of women mayors.

In some respects personal actors were as important for men as for women, suggesting that their importance may not be simply about gender per se. However, there were a couple of interesting differences that suggest gender may be at work. First, we found that women were more likely than men to face resistance to their candidacies from family members other than spouses. Second, notably larger proportions of women than men were likely to rate their children being older as a key consideration in their decisions to run. Consequently, the importance of actors in their personal lives in affecting women's decisions about candidacy seems to reflect the influence of gender.

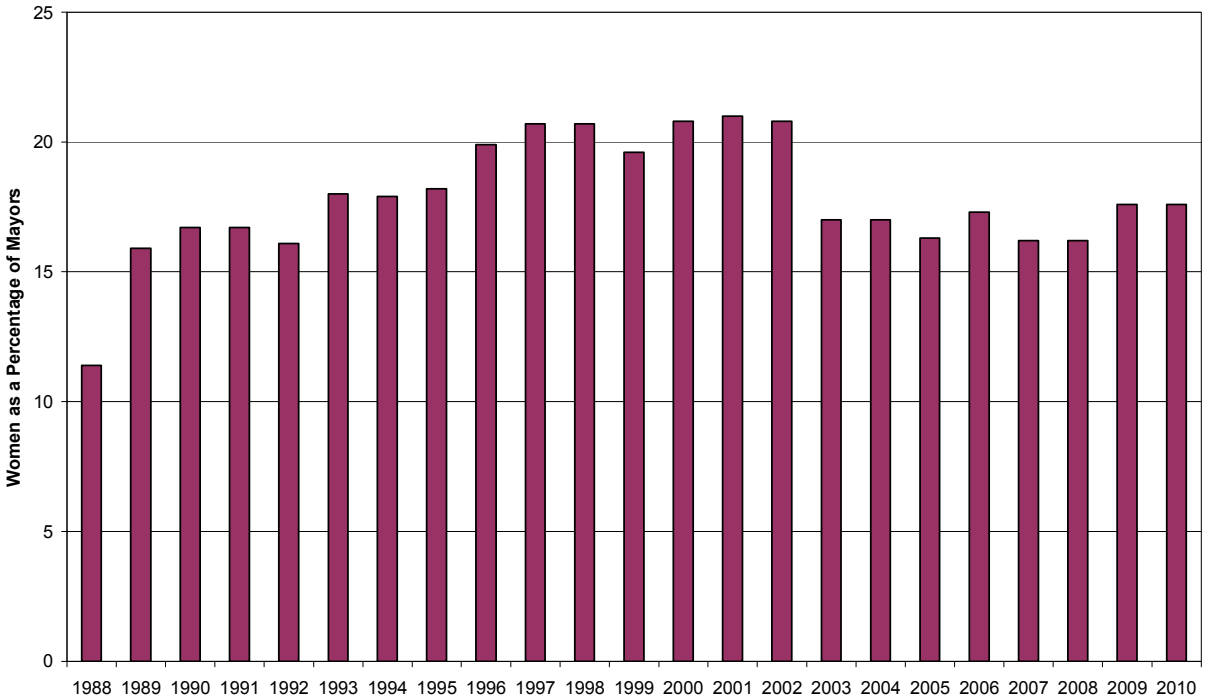
The other finding that stands out in our analysis of the various factors that affect women's decisions to run for local office seems clearly gender-related. In both their decision to run for municipal office the first time and their decision to seek the mayoralty, women more often than men were motivated by their concern over one or two particular public policy issues and less often motivated by a longstanding desire to run for public office. For these mayors of large cities,

policy considerations clearly played a more important role in women's decisions to run for office than in men's.

Appendix

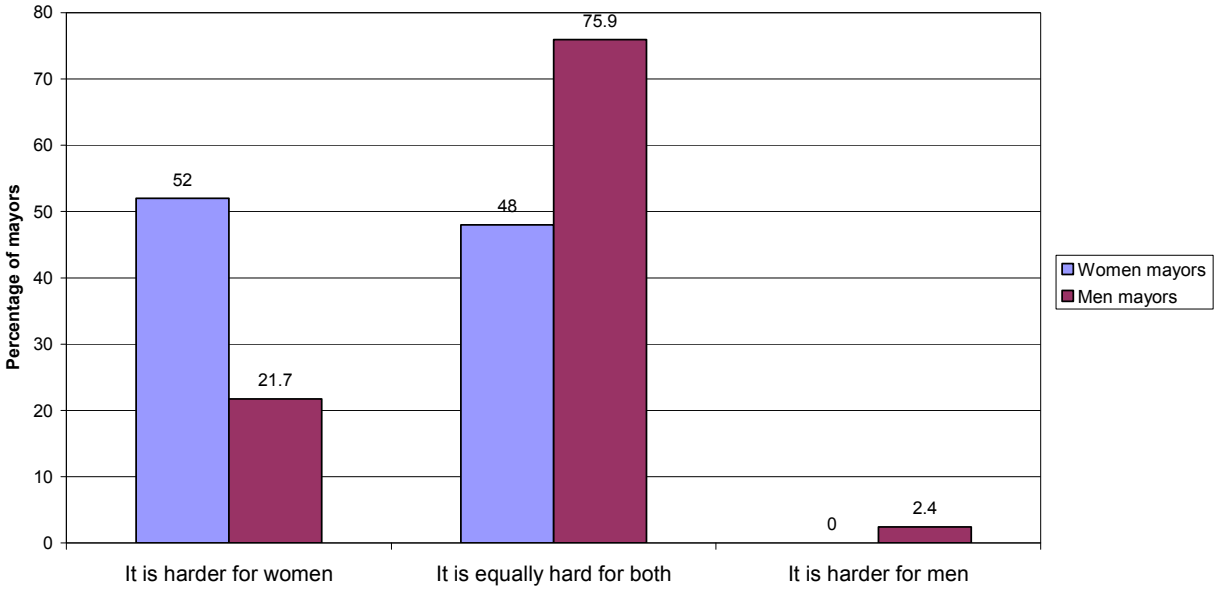
The 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study was administered by the research firm Abt/SRBI Inc. Data collection for mayors began in late February 2008 and continued through early September 2008. Respondents received an initial letter on Eagleton Institute of Politics letterhead informing them of the study and inviting them to complete the survey online. This letter was also sent electronically to those respondents with publicly available email addresses. Respondents who did not complete the web survey after this initial invitation were sent a paper copy of the survey instrument with a postage-paid, self-addressed return envelope. Non-respondents were subsequently re-contacted with reminder messages and additional copies of the survey instrument. Towards the end of the data collection period, remaining non-respondents received phone call reminder messages as well as invitations to complete the survey by phone. A majority of respondents (61%) completed the paper version of the survey although nearly one-third of respondents completed the web version (32.4%) and some completed the phone version (6.6%). Respondents were promised confidentiality.

Figure 1. Women Mayors of Large Cities (population 30,000 and above)



Source: CAWP, based on data collected from the U.S. Conference of Mayors' website.

Figure 2. Mayors' Beliefs about Gender and Raising Money



Question wording: "Which of the following statements best reflects your view? It is harder for female candidates to raise money than male candidates; it is harder for male candidates to raise money than female candidates; or it is equally hard for both."

Table 1. Mayors' Backgrounds: Selected Occupations

	Women %	Men %
Elementary or secondary school teacher	21.1	6.4
Lawyer	7.4	12.8
Real estate or insurance sales worker	6.3	9.0
Self-employed/small business owner	7.4	10.3
Other business	7.4	11.5
N =	*95*	*78*

Table 2. Women Mayors' Membership in Women's Organizations

	Member before running for office %	Member after running for office %
League of Women Voters	34.7	14.7
Other women's civic organization	50.5	4.3
A business or professional women's organization	38.3	3.2
A feminist group (e.g., NOW, WPC)	22.3	6.4
A sorority	21.7	0.0
A women's PAC (e.g., EMILY's List, WISH List, Susan B. Anthony List)	14.9	8.5
An organization of women public officials	9.7	35.5
A conservative women's organization (e.g., Concerned Women for America, Eagle Forum)	0.0	1.1
N =	*92 to 95*	

"Have you ever been a member of the following organizations? If yes, please indicate whether you were a member before you ran the first time for municipal office the first time or whether you joined later."

Table 3. Mayors' Activity in Civic Organizations Prior to Seeking Municipal Office

	Women %	Men %
A church-related or other religious group	31.3	14.5
Children or youth organization	29.3	20.5
Service club (e.g., Rotary)	28.3	25.3
Women's organization	25.3	3.6
Business or professional group	23.2	24.1
Civil rights or race/ethnic group	8.1	2.4
Teachers' organization	5.1	3.6
Labor organization	1.0	3.6
N =	*99*	*83*

"Prior to becoming a candidate for the first time, how active were you in any of the following organizations?"
Note: This table reports percentage "very active" prior to running.

Table 4. Mayors' Party Activity Prior to Seeking Municipal Office

	Women %	Men %
Member of local party committee	29.4	25.0
Delegate to local/state/national Convention	20.0	15.3
Chair of local party committee	7.1	6.9
Member or chair of state/national committee	4.7	4.2
N=	*85*	*72*

"Before you ran the very first time for municipal office, had you held any of the following party positions?"

Table 5. First Office Held by Mayors

	Women %	Men %
Municipal council	40.5	53.7
Board or commission (local or county)	35.4	27.8
School board (local or county)	11.4	5.6
State representative	7.6	5.6
Local executive (e.g., city attorney)	3.8	3.7
Other	1.3	3.7
N =	*79*	*54*

Note: This table is limited to those mayors with previous officeholding experience. The data in this table are the first elective or appointive office held.

Table 6. Mayors' Initial Decision to Seek Municipal Office

	Women %	Men %
It was entirely my idea to run.	33.0	33.7
I had already thought seriously about running when someone else suggested it.	23.7	33.7
I had not seriously thought about running until someone else suggested it.	43.3	32.5
N=	*97*	*83*

"In thinking about your initial decision to seek municipal office the very first time, which of the following statements most accurately describes your decision?"

Table 7. Most Influential Source of Encouragement to Run for Municipal Office

	Women %	Men %
Personal		
A friend, co-worker, or acquaintance	32.3	44.4
My spouse or partner	19.4	11.1
A family member (other than spouse)	3.2	9.3
Political		
An elected or appointed officeholder	29.0	24.1
A party official and/or legislative leader from my party	1.6	3.7
Organizational		
A member of a women's organization	3.2	0.0
A member of another organization or association	9.7	7.4
Other	1.6	0.0
N =	*62*	*54*

"Who was the most influential person in encouraging you to run?"
Note: Data are presented for those legislators who ran because they were encouraged or recruited (not self-starters).

Table 8. Sources of Efforts to Discourage Candidacy

	Women %	Men %
Personal		
A friend, co-worker, or acquaintance	44.7	53.1
My spouse or partner	7.9	9.4
A family member (other than spouse)	18.4	3.1
Political		
An elected or appointed officeholder	26.3	37.5
A party official and/or legislative leader from my party	7.9	18.8
Organizational		
A member of a women's organization	2.6	0.0
A member of another organization or association	18.4	18.8
Other	5.3	0.0
N =	*38*	*32*

"When you were making your initial decision to seek municipal office the very first time, did anyone try to discourage you from running? (Follow up): Who tried to discourage you?"
Note: Columns may sum to more than 100 because respondents could check more than one actor. Data are presented for those legislators who experienced efforts to discourage their candidacies.

Table 9. Factors Rated Very Important in Mayors' Decisions to Seek Municipal Office

	Women %	Men %
Approval of my spouse or partner	72.2	84.3
Realization that I was just as capable	71.4	56.6
My children being old enough	57.7	45.8
Occupation with flexibility	46.4	53.0
My concern about public policy issues	44.3	32.5
My assessment that I could handle public scrutiny I might face	36.1	43.4
Financial resources for campaign	34.7	34.9
Sufficient prior political experience	21.7	6.0
My longstanding desire to run	8.3	16.9
Having the support of my party	5.2	9.6
Participation in candidate training program or workshop	4.1	0.0
Contacts to enhance my career	3.1	4.8
Stepping-stone toward higher office	0.0	0.0

"Below are various factors that have been suggested to be important in influencing decisions to run for office. Please indicate how important each factor was in affecting your decision to run for municipal office the first time."
Note: N ranges from 83 to 98. Cell entries represent percentage of respondents identifying the factor as "very important." Columns can sum to more than 100% because mayors rated the importance of each factor.

Table 10. Top Reason for Seeking Mayoral Office

	Women %	Men %
My concern about one or more specific public policy issues	41.2	26.8
My desire to change the way government works	20.6	20.7
Dissatisfaction with the incumbent	11.3	15.9
My longstanding desire to be involved in politics	9.3	19.5
A party leader or an elected official asked me to run or serve	6.2	6.1
It seemed like a winnable race	1.0	1.2
Other	10.3	9.8
N=	*97*	*82*

"Other than your desire to serve the public, what was the single most important reason that you decided to seek the municipal office you now hold?"

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