

**Candidate Emergence in State Legislative Elections:
Does Public Funding Make a Difference?**

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Paper prepared for delivery at the
Temple - IPA State Politics and Policy Conference
May 30-31, 2008 Philadelphia, PA

Funding for this research was provided by the JEHT Foundation. I am grateful to Michael Hannahan of the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts for his help managing the survey and to Sandy Maisel for his advice in designing the survey instrument. Thanks also to graduate students Allison Dale and Nate Kraft for their research assistance.

Abstract

This paper examines the effect of public funding of campaigns on candidate emergence in state legislative elections. Using new data from a survey of community leaders in three states, it examines factors that influence the decision to run for state representative, looking especially at whether the availability of public funds induces qualified citizens to become candidates. The findings indicate that public funding of elections is likely encourage high quality candidates to run for office, particularly those who lack the motivation, skills or networks to raise private contributions. Public funding also appears to stimulate candidacies from those who are liberal ideologically. There is no evidence that under-represented groups such as women, minorities and low income individuals will take advantage of campaign subsidies to run for office. The implications of these findings are discussed.

To run for the legislature in the United States is hardly an easy venture. One challenge is the necessity of raising large sums of money to compete for office. In the 2006 congressional elections, for example, the winning candidates spent an average of \$1.2 million.¹ For state legislative races, campaign costs are considerably lower and vary depending on the state. The sums, however, are not trivial. In 2006 elections, the 50-state average for fundraising reached \$63,500 per race, and the median was \$20,493.² Except for the wealthy few, candidates must accept the fact that they will need to ask for money from friends, neighbors, interest groups and political parties. Among the politically ambitious, fundraising may be a minor irritant, a necessary labor on the path to elective office. For others who lack the skills, personal networks or inclination, this task might be as arduous as the trials of Hercules.

This paper explores how the campaign finance system discourages or encourages the politically ambitious to run for office. In contrast to previous research which focuses primarily on congressional elections this study focuses at the local level where community leaders are considering the next step on a career ladder, namely running for the lower house of the state legislature. It appears that few local leaders make this choice relative to the number of seats available. In the 2004 elections, roughly one in three races for the lower house went uncontested by a major party across the nation (1,673 of the 4,712 available seats).³ Remarkably little research has looked closely at why so few citizens choose to contest elections at this level. In this analysis, I examine whether

¹ “Big Picture: Price of Admission” Open Secrets.org: Center for Responsive Politics, 2006 Elections, 5/20/08. <http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/stats.php?cycle=2006&Display=A&Type=A>

² “State Elections Overview: 2006.” National Institute on Money in State Politics, 5/20/08. http://www.followthemoney.org/press/Reports/State_Overview_2006.pdf

³ “Unopposed State Legislative Seats, 2004” National Conference of State Legislatures, 5/20/08. http://www.ncsl.org/programs/press/2004/unopposed_2004.htm

changing the campaign finance system from a private to public-funded system would increase the pool and diversity of candidates running for the state legislature. The central question is this: would more people run if public funds were made available to candidates?

An underlying assumption of this analysis is that collecting private contributions imposes high costs on potential candidates. The prospect of seeking contributions can discourage even the political ambitious from running for office. Moreover, these costs are not distributed uniformly across individuals. Some individuals, perhaps from demographic groups, such as women or minorities, that tend to lack access to wealthy friends and business contacts may find it more difficult to compete for elective office. For this reason, a public funding system potentially attenuates the cost of raising campaign funds, thereby increasing the likelihood that more people will run, particularly individuals from under-represented groups.

With its focus on the impact of campaign finance rules, the theoretical approach in this study emphasizes the role of *electoral institutions* in influencing the decision to run for office. Previous work on candidate emergence tends to focus on candidates' *strategic* decisions, based on whether they believe they can win the nomination and general election (Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Maestas et al. 2006), as well as *recruitment* and *socialization* of political elites (Sanbonmatsu 2006; Lawless and Fox 2005). With respect to electoral institutions, comparative studies have shown how ballot access, single member districts, or majoritarian electoral systems depress candidacies (Norris 2004), but few have examined the impact of campaign finance system on candidate entry. Those that do tend to examine the question from the perspective of the strategic candidate who

chooses to avoid running because they confront an incumbent with a massive “war chest” (Epstein and Zemsky 1995; Box-Steffensmeier 1996; Hogan 2001; Goodliffe 2001).

However, this research was not designed to understand how variations in campaign finance laws affect decisions by politically ambitious individuals to seek office.

To understand the effect of public funds on candidate emergence I surveyed potential candidates in three states – Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The motivation to examine these states is based on the fact that the state legislature in Connecticut passed “Clean Election” reform in 2006, which is being implemented for the 2008 elections.⁴ Clean elections programs provide relatively generous grants to qualifying candidates to campaign for the nomination and general elections. Two other states, Maine and Arizona, have already implemented clean election programs starting in 2002.

The study exploits an opportunity to observe behavior before and after implementation Clean Elections in Connecticut. This paper, however, reflects an analysis of survey data in the first wave of the panel and cross-sectional study of potential candidates during the pre-reform phase (2006-2007). A subsequent survey for 2008-09 will provide the data necessary to examine changes in attitudes and behaviors in Connecticut after reform. For present purposes, this pre-reform survey asks respondents whether the availability of public funds would increase the likelihood that they would run for the lower house of the state legislature. As such, the findings remain provisional since responses are based on attitudes rather than observed behavior. The data, however,

⁴ This survey asked respondents about their views on running in 2006, well before the November 2008 elections.

establish an important baseline for understanding how the campaign finance system affects perceptions of political elites and their motivation to run for office.

Briefly, my results are as follows. The infusion of public funds for political campaigns appears to increase the likelihood that ambitious and quality candidates will run for the state legislature, particularly those who feel discouraged by the necessity to raise money or who are simply not very good at it. Not surprisingly, those who are ideologically liberal are most likely to take advantage of public subsidies to campaign for office. However, making public funds available does not appear to encourage underrepresented groups such as women, minorities or low income individuals to run. Other factors appear to be at work in depressing candidacies for the state legislature, at least among citizens who are already active in local politics and serious about running for higher office.

The implications of this work seem clear enough. The dearth of candidates in many legislatures have implications not only for electoral competition, but political representation and accountability (Gordon et al. 2007). Elections between or among qualified candidates are an essential mechanism for creating responsive political leaders and enhancing voter interest and turnout (Cox and Munger 1989; Verba et al. 1995; Carson et al. 2007). While candidate emergence studies have provided invaluable insights into why and when citizens choose to run for Congress, such decisions cannot necessarily be generalized to the local level where citizens are often considering their first run for 'higher' office. The vast majority of citizens who are considering a run for Congress made the choice to enter elective politics at an earlier stage (Francis and Kenny 2000). For all these reasons, it is critical to explore factors that influence candidate emergence at

the lower rungs of the political ladder and the degree to which campaign finance laws deter or encourage citizens to run for office.

Explaining Candidate Emergence

The dearth of competitive elections and lack of quality candidates has spawned numerous theories and empirical studies about causes. Essentially, four different explanations have emerged. The most widely recognized theory is tied to the concept of the *strategic candidate* who rationally considers the odds of winning the race before entering a contest (Black 1972; Jacobson and Kernell 1981). Specifically, potential candidates weigh the strength of the incumbent (Banks and Kiewiet 1989; Bianco 1984; Bond et al. 1985; Jacobson 1989; Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Krasno and Green 1988; Levitt and Wolfram 1997; Squire 1989). Incumbents possess many advantages, including the fact they are typically high quality candidates (Erikson 1971; Erikson and Wright 2000; Zaller 1998), they can exploit the perquisites of office to improve their standing with constituents (Ansolabehere and Snyder Jr 2000; Cain et al. 1987; Fenno 1978; Fiorina 1977; Mayhew 1974) they have access to abundant campaign resources (Abramowitz 1991; Abramowitz et al. 2006; Goodliffe 2001; Jacobson 1980) and they enjoy favorable district partisanship (Abramowitz et al. 2006; Levitt and Wolfram 1997). Strategic candidates also consider the political environment, including factors such as the partisan make-up of the district, local and national economic conditions, political scandals, and other races on the ballot (Herrnson 2004; Hogan 2004; Jacobson and Kernell 1981).

Overall, the findings point to the conclusion that high quality and politically ambitious candidates exist, but they prefer to wait for the incumbent to leave office rather

than contest the seat since the costs of running are high and the likelihood of gaining the benefit of office relatively low (Maestas et al. 2006).

A second strand of research observes political “gatekeepers” and the role of *recruitment*. The argument here is that gatekeepers determine who can successfully run for public office (Burrell 1993; Niven 1998; Norris 1997; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Sanbonmatsu 2006). Gatekeepers include political leaders, party members, interest groups and financial supporters who have access to resources and the means to help candidates get on the ballot. The power of gatekeepers to winnow candidates is enhanced when they control the nominating process through caucuses, conventions or party lists (Conway 2001). In the U.S. gatekeepers are also central to helping candidates raise money through networks of donors (Herrnson 2004). Moreover, research shows that gatekeepers can play a critical role in stimulating candidate entry simply by asking them to run (Sanbonmatsu 2006; Lawless and Fox 2005; Maisel et al. 2001).

A third and related explanation is *political socialization*. Citizens who seek elective office are more likely to emerge from particular social groups and backgrounds than others. This account, with its focus on political culture, is particularly relevant for women whose social roles appear to diminish their prospects for entering races. Research on candidate emergence has shown the powerful effect of gender socialization on willingness to run for office. Specifically, women are less likely to believe they are qualified to run for office even when they are as experienced and skillful as men (Lawless and Fox 2005). Moreover, gatekeepers may be biased against women and avoid seeking them out as candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2006). Stereotypes by the public also affect which candidates are perceived as qualified to run for office (Burrell 1994).

Finally, a fourth approach, which is rooted in structural explanations, considers the importance of *electoral institutions* in shaping candidate emergence. In this view, the rules of the game – voting procedures, ballot access, campaign funding, etc. – determine primarily who runs for office. Electoral laws and regulations allocate power among particular elites, giving more (or less) discretion to particular gatekeepers. All else being equal, for example, gatekeepers are more likely to endorse women seeking office in multimember districts (Rule and Zimmerman 1992) and in electoral systems using some form of proportional representation (Norris 2004). Moreover, it is argued that certain voting systems, such as instant runoff voting, could make racial minorities and women more viable (Richie and Kleppner 2000).

Campaign finance rules constitute an important institutional element in structuring the electoral system, and yet their impact on candidate emergence has not been observed directly. Although money is not the only obstacle for challengers, it looms large because of its high marginal value for emerging candidates who need to gain name recognition through campaigning. Moreover, raising money appears to have high costs for new entrants. Among potential congressional challengers who choose not to run for office, the most cited reason is the burden of raising large amounts of funds (Maisel et al. 2001).

Indeed, this survey demonstrates a similar finding. Figure 1 shows that raising money *strongly* discourages potential candidates from running (30%), more so than any other factor listed in the survey. After that, respondents identified lost privacy (23%) and the “negative effect on home and family life (21%). Well down on the list are the rigors of campaigning, or the problems associated with serving in the legislature. Thus, it

appears that money is a significant obstacle to potential candidates. This study fills an important gap in the literature by observing whether the availability of public funds would affect their decision to enter the electoral arena.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Theory and Expectations

Based on theories of candidate emergence, I expect the availability of public funds to increase the likelihood that potential candidates will run for office. The provision of public funds alters several aspects of the decision-making process for potential candidates, but especially their assessment of the *costs* to run. Consider a basic model of the candidate decision to enter a race.

$$u(L) = PB - C$$

where,

$u(L)$ = the utility of being in the legislature (a seat in the lower house) to the potential candidate.

B = the benefit the candidate receives from winning. This term reflects the *political ambition* of the potential candidate, i.e., how much he or she wants to hold office.

P = the potential candidates' estimate of the chances of winning. This term reflects the *strategic decision* made by the politically ambitious.

C = the cost associated with running for the state legislature. This term reflects the costs imposed by *electoral institutions* such as the campaign finance system on candidates with varying levels of personal resources.

This analysis is primarily interested in the C term of this equation. The underlying theoretical premise is that the availability of public funds has the potential to lower the individual cost of choosing to run for office by making it easier to obtain campaign funds. I expect that the most direct impact of public funding will be on individuals who find fundraising to be a major obstacle to running for office. The more intensely individuals say they are *discouraged by raising money* the more likely they will claim public funding would alter their decision to run.

Another cost that is not always acknowledged in the research is how raising money creates a sense of indebtedness to contributors. Some candidates would rather not ask for money if they believe it constrains their actions in office. Thus, individuals who tend to believe that the *private-fundraising system forces politicians to compromise their behavior* will be more likely to say that the availability of public funds would encourage them to run for office.

Finally, fundraising costs are not distributed evenly across individual candidates. The cost of raising money may be especially salient for candidates from socio-demographic groups that traditionally lack political networks where campaign money tends to be raised. These include individuals from *low income* groups, *women*, and *minorities*. Raising private money might also be more difficult for individuals who

profess beliefs that challenge to the interests and values of citizens who typically donate money. The vast majority of political contributions from Political Action Committees tend to come from business interests, and many individual donors are in professions with a strong stake in pro-business policies. For this reason, candidates who are *liberal* may have more difficulty raising private funds and would be more likely to run for office if public funds were available. Similarly, candidates who are *Democrats* might find it more difficult to raise private money than the pro-business Republicans.

On the benefit side of the equation, public funds are likely to be most attractive to individuals who are already interested in running for office (the politically ambitious) and those who think they have a good shot at winning (the strategic candidate). For this reason, I expect respondents who expect high benefits from elective office (the “B” term) to be more likely to exploit public funds to pursue office. Similarly, public funds should be attractive to those who believe they have a good chance of winning future elections (the “P” term).

Recruitment by political elites should matter as well. Being asked to run by gatekeepers has the potential to alter all three components of the model: costs, benefits and probability of winning. Regarding the C term, gatekeepers typically help defray the cost of campaigning by providing resources and expertise. With respect to B, gatekeepers can alter the perception or reality of benefits to be received by holding office. For the purposes of this model, however, I place recruitment conceptually under the P term. When gatekeepers contact candidates, they send a strong signal that the candidate can win. Thus, being recruited makes a candidate think he or she can win, and increases the odds of entering a race.

Note that the theoretical model does not attempt to assess the impact of *political socialization or culture* in affecting a candidate's decision to run, except insofar as I will control for the state where respondents might run for office.

Data and Methods

The data for this analysis comes from surveys of political notables in local communities in three New England states, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The respondents were assembled through two separate surveys, based on the instruments developed by L. Sandy Maisel and Walter Stone for their candidate emergence studies in congressional elections for 1998, 2000, and 2002. The first survey is an Informant Survey, which was sent to individuals in every legislative district for the lower house in each state. These informants were selected based on the expectation that they are knowledgeable about the politics in the district, but are unlikely to run as candidates themselves. Informants include primarily delegates to state party conventions, county and town party chairs, as well as business, labor and other civic leaders. Informant-respondents were asked to provide an assessment of the district's partisanship and ideology, the characteristics and overall quality of the incumbent representing the district, and suggestions of potential candidates who might have considered running but did not (up to 4) for the lower house of the legislature.

The second survey, the Potential Candidate Survey, was sent to potential candidates identified by informants in the first survey for whom we have valid addresses, and to all locally elected officials in those districts, including municipal chief executive officers, municipal clerks and those who serve in a municipal legislative body whose

towns overlap with the legislative district, whether or not they had been named by the informants. Local town officials, including elected members of the town select board and school board, are included in this survey because these offices are typically where state legislative candidates emerge. In the Potential Candidate Survey, respondents were asked about decisions related to whether they would run for the state legislature in the 2006 election or in the foreseeable future.⁵ The survey also asked about their personal and political background, their interest in running for different offices, the deterrents to and motivations for running, and their assessment of their chances of winning the party nomination and general election in upcoming elections. Importantly, the survey asked “would the availability of public funds increase the chance of your running for State Representative?” (Yes or No/Do not know). This is the dependent variable for the current analysis.

The “reputational” approach to identifying potential candidates has its advantages and disadvantages. One clear advantage is that it does, in fact, locate individuals interested in running for office. The challenge of this study is to find citizens who do not appear on the ballot even though they might have the ambition and talent to run. By relying on opinions of local notables, it is possible to identify the “no shows” and assemble a list of plausible candidates. Informants in this study provided the names of 357 potential candidates, which in turn, generated surveys from 83 individuals for a 23% response rate. The balance of surveys came from individuals identified through political and civic organizations that tend to produce candidates for the state legislature (Francis and Kenny 2000). Overall, 3,940 surveys were sent to leaders of town or school boards, labor unions, bar associations, business groups, religious congregations and civic

⁵ The goal is to repeat the survey process in 2008-09 to evaluate changes after Clean Elections takes effect.

organizations, especially minority-based groups in each state. Through these efforts I obtained an additional 630 surveys for a response rate of 16%. In total, there were 713 survey responses (313 Connecticut, 349 Massachusetts, and 51 Rhode Island).

One disadvantage of reputational approach is that it systematically ignores individuals who are not part of traditional networks of political elites (Fox and Lawless 2005; Lawless and Fox 2005).⁶ Therefore, marginalized groups such as women and minorities might be under-represented in the pool of potential candidates. I have tried to address the issue by over-sampling among these groups and sending surveys to organizations with women and minorities in leadership positions. As Table 1 shows, 31% of my sample are women and 9% are nonwhite (2% black, 2% Hispanic, 5% other). The nonwhite population in these three states is roughly 16%.⁷

[insert Table 1 here]

An additional caveat about the data is that the highest response rate came from individuals who have experience in elective office. Fully 85% of my respondents hold local elective office, or have held it in the past. These aggregate data suggest that the vast majority of the respondents have already made the first step on the career ladder in politics. They therefore reflect a rarefied group of citizens who participate in politics much more than the average citizen. However, while the sample contains some ambitious politicians, most are not prepared to run for the state legislature any time soon. For

⁶ Fox and Lawless 2005 use the eligibility pool sample which systematically seeks out respondents from similarly situated individuals who work in the professions where candidates are most likely to emerge.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office, "United States Census 2000." Available at <http://www.census.gov/census2000/states/ct.html>

example, 32% say they have a strong interest in a career in the state legislature, 16% considered running in 2006, and only 2% actually ran. Overall, the sample includes elites for whom the cost of politics did not deter them from running for local office, even though very few attempted to run for the state legislature. Given that these individuals appear to possess political resources and ambition to overcome the cost of running locally, the findings could be biased *against* finding a significant role for public funds.

The motivation to observe Connecticut, in particular, originates from the fact that the legislature passed “clean elections” reform in 2006. Clean elections offers generous public grants to qualifying candidates in exchange for (a) collecting a minimum number of signatures and small (\$5) contributions, and (b) promising to forego all forms of private financing in the election.⁸ Candidates who meet these requirements receive a set amount of money from each state’s clean elections fund.⁹ Given its adoption of clean elections starting in the 2008 elections, Connecticut offers an ideal opportunity to test the effect of public financing on candidate emergence because it is possible to assess the pool of potential candidates before and after implementation of reform.¹⁰

Connecticut is also a useful state to study for wider applications because it falls in the middle range along several dimensions of state politics. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Connecticut is considered a “hybrid” legislature, because it shares features of both professional and amateur state legislatures.¹¹ In hybrid

⁸ In Connecticut, candidates for state representative must collect a minimum of \$5,000 in amounts ranging from \$5-\$100 from 150 residents of municipalities included, in whole or in part, in the district.

⁹ The funding level is established based on previous election spending levels and is not dependent on the number of candidates who participate. In Connecticut, the amount of public subsidy for a participating legislative candidate in the 2008 elections will total \$10,000 in the primary and \$25,000 in the general. See Connecticut Elections Enforcement Commission (2007).

¹⁰ Two other states, Arizona and Maine, have been using this system since 2000.

¹¹ See http://www.ncsl.org/programs/press/2004/backgrounder_fullandpart.htm.

legislatures, members spend more than two-thirds of a full time job being legislators.¹² While election expenses in Connecticut are in the lower range among American states – especially because the districts are relatively small – they fall somewhere closer to the middle on a per capita basis. In one study of the 1994 elections, the average spending in a Connecticut legislative contest was \$11,841, compared with a 27-state average of \$46,000. The spending per voter was 72 cents in Connecticut versus a national average of 98 cents (Hogan 2000). Furthermore, Connecticut provides a good test case for the effect of reform on expanding participation among under-represented groups. According to the Institute on Money in State Politics, Latinos comprise 9.4 percent of Connecticut’s population but represented just 3 percent of 2004 general-election House candidates running on major-party tickets. Moreover, Latino House candidates collected less, on average, than non-Latino counterparts (Moore 2006).

Massachusetts and Rhode Island are part of this study as well because these states provide good comparisons with Connecticut. Massachusetts was selected because the state adopted clean elections in 2002, but the legislature failed to fund the program. Thus, the voters of the state showed a willingness to have this program even though it was never implemented. Another feature of Massachusetts is that it has a professional legislature which can be compared to Connecticut’s semi-professional legislature. For a similar reason, Rhode Island was also selected because, as an amateur legislature, it offers another basis for comparison. Finally, all three states reflect a New England political culture, dominated by the Democratic Party, and they share similar political histories, with the emergence of strong ethnic Irish and Italian urban machines earlier in

¹² Although income from legislative work is greater in hybrid than that in the amateur legislatures, it is usually not enough to allow members to make a living without having other sources of income.

the 20th century. While a study of New England states might limit the capacity to generalize the findings to other states, this design allows for some control for political culture – a notoriously difficult variable to measure.

This survey reflects the first wave in a panel study that includes two election cycles. Using the first-wave of data, I seek to understand whether public funds would increase the probability that potential candidates would run for office. Each candidate was asked, “Would the availability of public funds increase the chances of your running for state representative?” The dependent variable in this study is a dichotomous: Yes = 1; No or I don’t know =0.

The independent variables are listed Table 2, with associated concepts for each term of the equation, $u(L) = PB - C$. The concept of greatest interest is “cost”, namely how public financing changes perceptions about the cost of running for office. A key variable is the degree to which the private system discourages respondents from running. Another important variable is to degree to which respondent believe taking contributions makes it difficult for officeholders to pursue the public interest. The remaining demographic variables (gender, income, race) and political variables (ideology and partisanship) try to capture how public financing would affect various categories of candidates.

The model also includes variables to measure the strategic candidate thesis. Regarding ambition, variables measure both “general” (want to hold office) and “particular” (want to hold THIS office now) ambition. Two variables are included to take into account the effect of the life cycle on general ambition, including having young children, or being of an age when many choose to retire.

Turning to strategic factors, the model includes variables that measure the *quality* of the candidate (self-perceived), their *chances of winning* a seat in the district, and the degree to which they are willing to *risk a run* even if they are not favored to win. The most important factor in this conceptual category is the degree to which the candidate believes he or she is a good fundraiser. I expect *poor fundraisers* to be more inclined to say that public funding would make a difference in their decision to run.¹³

Finally, dummy variables are included for Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Explanations for the direction of the coefficient for Massachusetts are difficult to untangle. On the one hand, potential candidates in Massachusetts, where races are more expensive than in Connecticut, might be more likely to say that public funds would spur them to run. On the other hand, running in Massachusetts with its professional might involve additional costs of time and effort that are not captured fully in this model. For similar reasons, the direction of the coefficient is difficult to predict for Rhode Island with its amateur legislature.

Findings

Overall, 28% of respondents said the availability of public funds would *increase* their chances of running for state representative.¹⁴ Figure 2 indicates that the response varies across different demographic and partisan groups. As expected, nonwhites and

¹³ One variable measures the perceptions of others regarding the candidate. The survey asks the respondent whether he/she was contacted by various groups (parties, interest groups, media, neighbors, etc.). The variable “contacts” is a count of how many times the respondent reported being contacted by different groups. To gain a sense of how risk averse the respondent is to running for office, the survey asked how likely the respondent would run for office if he or she faced an opponent who was slightly favored to win wither the nomination or the election.

¹⁴ In a separate analysis, not shown here, given a choice between a public funding system similar to “clean elections” and one that involved partial public funding, 46% of respondents expressed a preference for the former and 51% for the latter (and 3% suggested “other”).

individuals with incomes under \$50,000 are more likely to say that the availability of public funds might encourage them to run for state representative. Surprisingly, women differ little from men. Among those who *dislike* fundraising, 32% said public financing would encourage them to run, compared to only 18% among those who are not discouraged by soliciting private contributions.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Political factors also seem to matter. As expected, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say the availability of public money would encourage them to run (36% compared to the overall average of 26%). A similar pattern exists for individuals who profess a liberal ideology compared to conservatives. Presumably, conservative activists are much less likely to take advantage of public financing because they do not believe the government should subsidize campaigns.¹⁵ I also theorize that liberals are less likely to get political contributions from pro-business interests than conservatives. Regarding differences across states, no difference exists between respondents in Connecticut and Massachusetts (even though elections tend to be more expensive in Massachusetts), while more respondents in Rhode Island said public funds would spur them to enter the race.

To put these findings to a stronger test, I ran a logit model that includes the measures for *costs* of running, the *benefits* of office and the *probability of gaining* those benefits. The results in Table 3 confirm several hypotheses about which kind of candidates would take advantage of public funds to run for office. Reflecting the “cost”

side of the equation, those who feel discouraged by having to raise money say public funds would kindle a decision to run. Moreover, respondents who believe that private contributions lead to undue influence on policymaking also say public funds would make a difference. However, being a woman or minority appears to make no difference after controlling for other factors. These findings might reflect that fact that the sample includes elites from such groups who have already passed a high threshold for political activism and raising money is not particularly problematic for them. Curiously, however, the coefficient for the female dummy variable is negative suggesting that, for women, other factors might forestall a run for office – factors that are not captured in the model.

Regarding differential costs imposed on candidates with “anti-business” ideologies, it appears that self-declared liberals are more likely to say access to public financing would increase the odds of running. However, public funds do not necessarily induce Democrats (or as an Independents) once ideology is controlled for.

Confirming previous theories of candidate emergence, the results demonstrate that public financing appeals to the politically ambitious. Those who pursue public service to advance their political careers are more likely to say reforms such as clean elections would encourage them to run. Interestingly, “issue” activists are no more likely to be attracted to office through campaign subsidies. Nor are individuals who pursue office to extend their network of future business contacts.¹⁶ Moreover, individuals in particular stages of the life cycle – such as those rearing young children, or approaching retirement – are not likely to be induced to run with public money. Regarding individuals with

¹⁵ The causal mechanism behind this relationship is not clear, but previous studies indicate that public financing is more popular among liberal leaning activists than among conservatives (Grant and Rudolph 2004; Francia et al. 2003).

“particular ambition” to run for the state legislature, it appears that public funds could make a difference, but those who contemplated a run in 2006 are no more likely to say public funds would matter to them in their choice.

Finally, the model observes how strategic factors (the “P” term) might interact with public financing. The variables in this conceptual category aim to measure the extent to which public funds might attract high quality candidates who have a shot at winning. Regarding quality, the analysis suggests that those who believe themselves to be strong campaigners and those who are poor fundraisers would benefit especially. These findings seem especially important since it suggests that a public financing system might attract good candidates who are not necessarily good at fundraising. On the other hand, potential candidates who have strong name recognition or who have held office do not seem encouraged by public funds. Perhaps these candidates do not feel the need for spending campaign money as much as others because they are already well known in their communities.

It is quite clear from this analysis that candidates who are perceived as good by others will be more likely to take advantage of public funds. The more recruitment “contacts” received by the respondent the more likely he or she will seek office. Surprisingly, however, respondents who think they have a strong chance of winning the nomination or general election in 2008 do not appear encouraged to run with public funds. The negative coefficient for the nomination variable is especially puzzling. It suggests, perhaps, that the most competitive candidates in the primaries are less concerned about campaign money than other factors. On the other hand, given a

¹⁶ In conversations with legislators who opposed clean elections in Connecticut, some argued the public financing law would be exploited by local business owners to advertise their names and products.

hypothetical situation in which the respondents were asked if they would compete for the nomination even if the odds were *slightly against* them, the availability of public funds appears to be a significant factor in encouraging them to run. Perhaps they are willing to undergo greater risks when campaign money is easier to acquire. If so, then programs like clean elections might encourage greater competition in the nominating process.

Comparing states, respondents in Massachusetts are less likely to say the availability of public funds would make a difference for them in running for office. With a professional legislature in Massachusetts, respondents may be considering other obstacles that are unobserved in this study – obstacles which are not easily overcome even with subsidized campaigns. In contrast, the coefficient for Rhode Island was positive but not statistically significant.

Summary and Conclusion

Overall, this analysis suggests that the availability of public funds would encourage more candidates to run for the state legislature, a finding that is consistent with a previous analysis on gubernatorial elections (Bardwell 2002). Clearly, many candidates believe that fundraising is a serious obstacle to running for office. More than 1 in 4 said that the availability of having public funds would encourage them to run. Based on this analysis, it appears that subsidizing campaigns is likely to benefit two classes of potential candidates.

The first class includes those for whom money looms as a serious impediment to political engagement. These are the potential candidates who do not like to raise money, who are not necessarily good at it, and who feel that accepting contributions necessarily

compromises the public interest. Given these findings, it seems that reforms such as clean elections have the potential to alter the skill set of those choosing to run for office. Under clean elections (or similar public financing programs), being a good fundraiser could become less important in defining good candidates, and less salient as a practice that helps one rise through the ranks of leadership in the legislature. Research has examined, for example, how good fundraisers get leadership positions in Congress (Heberlig 2003). Future studies might explore whether public financing programs alter who attains leadership positions and gains influence in the legislature.

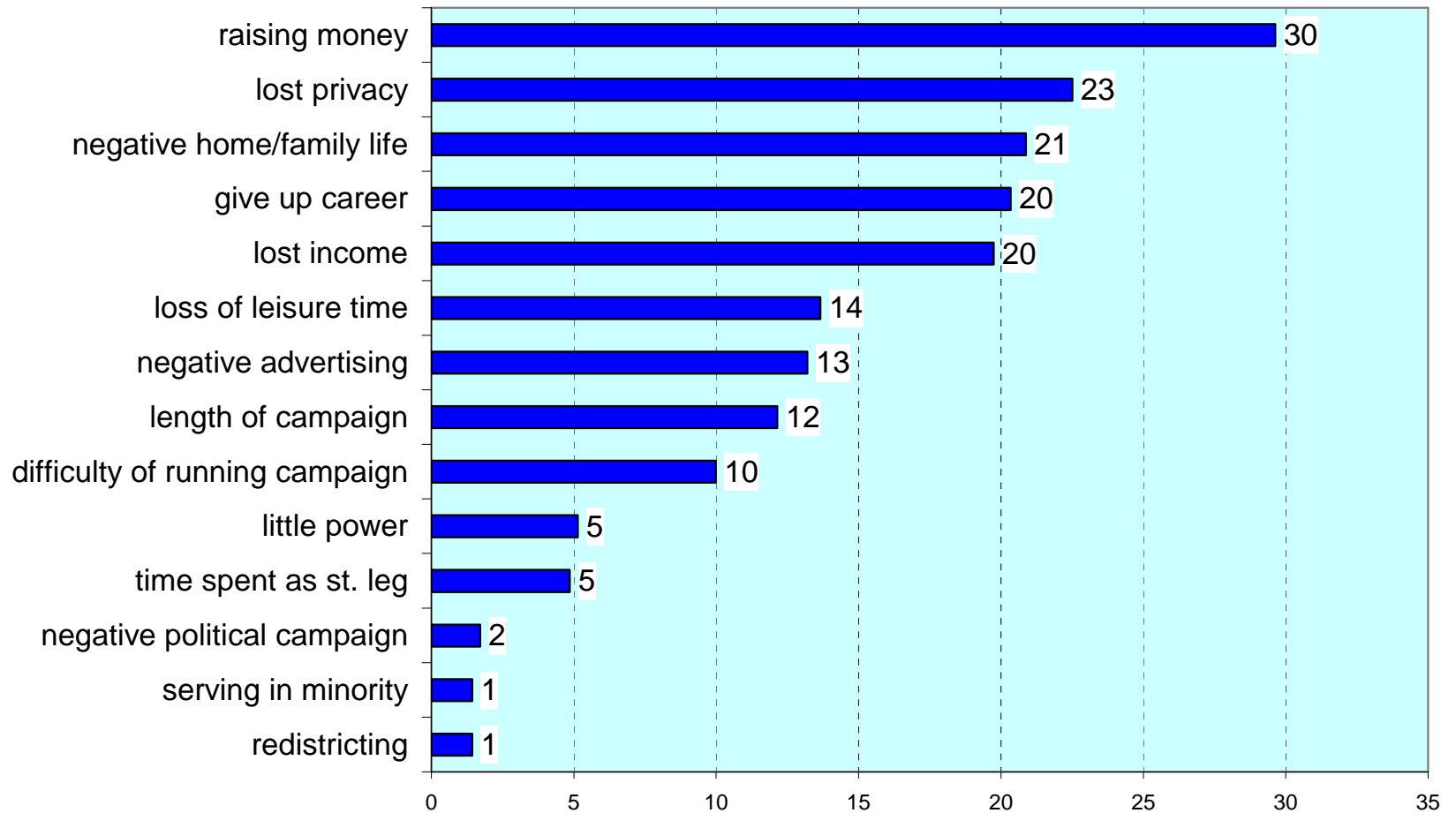
Interestingly, ideological liberals appear especially poised to take advantage of public funds to run for office. It is unclear, however, if this reflects a situation in which liberals find it harder to raise private money from business-oriented contributors (since liberals tend to favor government intervention in markets), or if it is simply because liberals like the idea of having government pay for campaigns. Both motives are plausible. At any rate, reforms such as clean elections obviously appeal to ideological liberals, a finding that suggests the pool of liberal candidates for office should increase if campaigns are subsidized. Thus, the partisan and policy implications of clean elections programs are worth exploring if this reform gains traction across the states.

This study has failed to demonstrate that underrepresented demographic groups will take advantage of subsidized political campaigns. Public funding does not appear to increase the candidacies of women and minorities once other factors are controlled for. Nor does it appear to increase the likelihood that individuals from low income households will run. Other research approaches could be more fruitful here, including a study of socialization and recruitment patterns among under-represented groups.

A second class of potential candidates who should take advantage of public financing appears to be the politically ambitious. These include the community leaders who are already contemplating a career in elective office, and who are regarded by others as good candidates. In reality, however, the impact of a public financing could be quite limited because strategic factors (related to whether candidates think they can actually win the race) might remain more salient in their decision. To the degree that the partisan composition of a district is unfavorable to a competitive election – either in the primary or general – reforms such as clean elections are unlikely to draw out many more candidates. However, this study suggests that, to the degree that candidates think they have a chance of winning, they will exploit public funds to run for office.

Finally, the public financing effects might vary across states with professional, hybrid or amateur legislatures. Respondents in Massachusetts, where the legislature is professional, were less likely to say that the availability of public funds would encourage them to run. The power of incumbency or other obstacles to potential challengers might be so significant as to render public financing a relatively minor benefit. More research needs to explore the obstacles facing challengers in American legislative elections. A better understanding of this dynamic will illuminate whether clean elections-style reforms will work in states with highly professional legislatures.

Figure 1. Factors that Discourage Running for State Representative



Source: Author survey of potential candidates in CT, MA and RI; N= 698.

Percentage Responding "Strongly Discourages Me"

**Table 2. Model and Measurement of Concepts
Predicting Impact of Public Funding on Potential Candidate Decisions**

Concepts	Measurement	Variable Name	Coding	Exp Direct
1. Costs Imposed by Private Financed System (C term)				
	whether raising money discourages R from running	money discourages	1-4 no difference to strongly discourages	+
	whether private contributions compromise officeholder	contributions compromise	1-5 strongly disagree to strongly agree	+
	R's gender	female	1 or 0	+
	R's family income less than \$50,000	family income < \$50K	1 or 0	+
	R's race is non-white	nonwhite	1 or 0	+
	R's ideology (liberal-conservative)	liberal	1-7 extremely lib to extremely con	+
	R would run as a Democrat	Democrat	1 or 0	+
2 Ambition to Hold Office (B term)				
<i>a. General ambition to run for office</i>				
	R wants to run to advance political career	advance political career	1-5 very unimportant to very important	+
	R wants to run to advance particular issues	advance issues	1-5 very unimportant to very important	+
	R wants to run to increase business contacts	increase business contacts	1-5 very unimportant to very important	-
	R has children under 6	children under 6	1 or 0	-
	R is older than 65	over 65 years old	1 or 0	-
<i>b. Particular ambition</i>				
	R's attraction to career in state legislature	attracted to career in st. leg	1-5 very low to very high	+
	R considered running for state legislature in 2006	considered running '06	1 or 0	+
3. Strategic Factors (P term)				
<i>a. Self-perceived qualifications</i>				
	R's self-assessed ability to raise money	moneyskill	1-5 weak to strong	-
	R's self-assessed strength as campaigner	strong campaigner	1-5 weak to strong	+
	R's experience in elective office (school, town, mayor)	elected now or past	1 or 0	+
	R's has been active in state legislative campaigns	campaign experience legis	1 or 0	+

R's self-assessed name recognition as candidate	name recognition	1-5 weak to strong	+
<i>b. Chances of winning</i>			
incumbent in the same party as R	same party as incumbent	1 or 0	-
Count of number of groups contacting R to run	contacts (count)	1-13 count of contacts	+
R's estimate of winning 2008 nomination if he/she ran	est of winning 08 nom.	1-5 unlikely to likely	+
R's estimate of winning 2008 general if he/she ran	est of winning 08 gen	1-5 unlikely to likely	+
<i>c. Level of risk aversion</i>			
R's likelihood of running in primary if opp slightly favored	slight underdog for nomination	1-5 unlikely to likely	+
R's likelihood of running in general if opp slightly favored	slight underdog for general	1-5 unlikely to likely	+
State Level Controls			
Massachusetts	ma	1 or 0	
Rhode Island	ri	1 or 0	

Figure 2. Would Availability of Public Funds Increase the Likelihood of Your Running for State Representative?

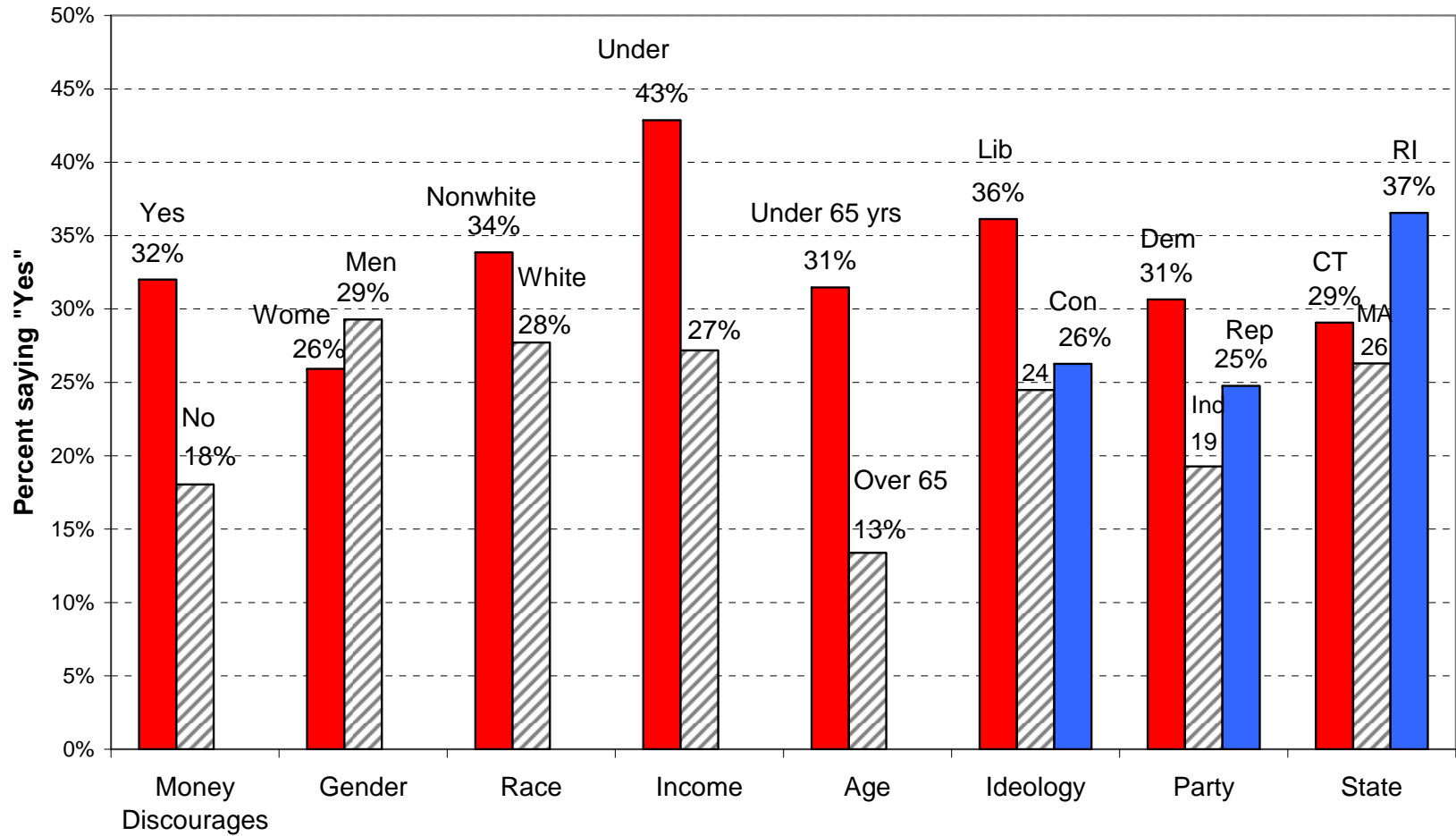


Table 3. Logit Model
Predicting Impact of Public Funding on Decision to Run for State Legislature

Concepts	Variable Name	Expected Direction	Logit Coef.	Std. Err.	
1. Costs Imposed by Private Financed System (C term)					
	money discourages	+	0.457	0.122	**
	contributions compromise	+	0.468	0.101	**
	female	+	-0.499	0.268	
	family income < \$50K	+	0.740	0.457	
	nonwhite	+	-0.110	0.432	
	liberal	+	0.728	0.278	**
	Democrat	+	-0.444	0.285	
2 Ambition to Hold Office (B term)					
<i>a. General ambition to run for office</i>					
	advance political career	+	0.547	0.124	**
	advance issues	+	0.108	0.117	
	increase business contacts	-	-0.171	0.108	
	children under 6	-	-0.797	0.362	*
	over 65 years old	-	-0.805	0.393	*
<i>b. Particular ambition</i>					
	attracted to career in st. leg	+	0.599	0.121	**
	considered running '06	+	0.436	0.292	
3. Strategic Factors (P term)					
<i>a. Self-perceived qualifications</i>					
	moneyskill	-	-0.390	0.140	**
	strong campaigner	+	0.425	0.149	**
	elected now or past	+	0.180	0.417	
	campaign experience legis	+	-0.119	0.244	
	name recognition	+	-0.209	0.124	
<i>b. Chances of winning</i>					
	same party as incumbent	-	0.177	0.265	
	contacts (count)	+	0.104	0.046	*
	est of winning 08 nom.	+	-0.161	0.092	
	est of winning 08 gen	+	0.050	0.089	
<i>c. Level of risk aversion</i>					
	slight underdog for	+	0.350	0.111	**

	nomination			
	slight underdog for general	+	0.088	0.101
State Level Controls				
	ma		-0.494	0.240 *
	ri		0.603	0.467
Constant			-5.464	0.946

** p<.01, * p<.05

Number of obs	
=	664.00
LR chi2(27)	
=	260.68
Prob > chi2 =	0.00
Pseudo R2	
=	0.33
Log likelihood =	-262.51

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