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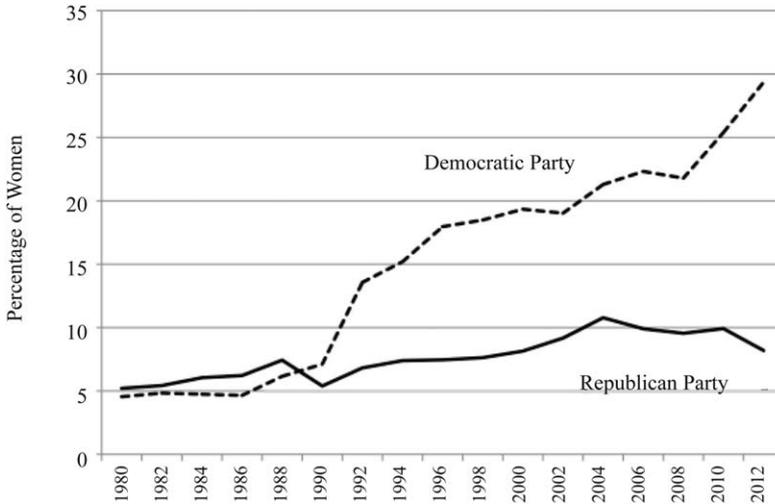
## *Why So Few (Republican) Women? Explaining the Partisan Imbalance of Women in the U.S. Congress*

This article examines why the percentage of Democratic women in Congress has increased dramatically since the 1980s while the percentage of Republican women has barely grown. The central claim is that ideological conformity with the party influences the decision to run for office, and I suggest that partisan polarization has discouraged ideological moderates in the pipeline from pursuing a congressional career. The findings have gendered implications because, first, Republican women in the pipeline have historically been to the left of their male counterparts, and second, there is a dearth of conservative women in the pipeline.

The question “Why are there so few women in politics?” has motivated more than three decades of political science scholarship. The underrepresentation of women in elective office remains as relevant now as it was 30 years ago, particularly in the American context. At the national legislative level, the United States is ranked 78th worldwide, with women comprising only 18% of the US House of Representatives (IPU 2012). While the number of women in Congress has increased over time, the growth rate has stagnated since the early 1990s. The persistent dearth of females in congressional office is especially puzzling in light of the fact that there are more women engaged in the professional careers traditionally seen as providing the necessary experience and qualifications for political office.

The underrepresentation of women in Congress has received ample attention to date, but existing research has largely overlooked a critical feature of this trend. Contemporary patterns of women’s representation have a distinctly partisan flavor: the number of Democratic women in Congress has increased dramatically since the 1980s, while the number of Republican women has barely grown. Of the 232 Republicans now serving in the House of Representatives, a mere 19, or 8% of the party

FIGURE 1  
Women in the US Congress, by Party (1980–2012)



Source: Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), “Women in the US Congress,” 2013. Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University.

delegation, are women. Women are more than three times as likely to be Democrats, though just 30 years ago they were evenly distributed between the two parties. The 1992 “Year of the Woman” elections led to the first significant jump on the Democratic side, but what is perhaps most striking is that there has been a steady increase in the number of Democratic women elected to Congress since then. As shown in Figure 1, women now make up nearly 30% of the Democratic delegation; by contrast, the proportion of females in the Republican Party has hovered between 6% and 10% since the 1980s. The traditional emphasis on the underrepresentation of women in Congress masks this crucial partisan variation.

Scholars have largely pursued party-blind and party-neutral explanations for the underrepresentation of women in office, but even our most prominent theories fail to account for this growing partisan disparity. And despite the increasing importance of partisan polarization, the impact of candidate ideology has received little attention in the gender literature. This article introduces a party fit explanation for the

partisan gap among women in Congress. It is the first analysis of how ideology influences the emergence of women candidates, and the central claim is that ideological conformity with the party delegation shapes the decision to run for office. State legislative office is the traditional pipeline to Congress, and I test this hypothesis with a national survey of state legislators (Maestas et al. 2006) and ideology estimates of state legislators who did and did not run for Congress from 2000 to 2010 (Bonica 2014). I find that, regardless of gender, ideologically moderate state legislators are less likely to run for Congress than those at the poles. The findings have implications for women and politics, because, first, Republican women in the congressional pipeline have historically been to the left of their male counterparts, and second, there is a dearth of conservative women in the pipeline. The article offers a new explanation for recent patterns of female representation in Congress.

### **Limiting Women's Paths to Office**

The three leading explanations for why women are underrepresented in American politics are, for the most part, either party-blind or party-neutral. The earliest studies explored how structural forces affected the emergence of women in politics, and scholars cited the incumbency advantage and the dearth of women in the pipeline as examples of barriers that hindered women candidates (e.g., Burrell 1994; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Duerst-Lahti 1998; Palmer and Simon 2008). The expectation was that as women entered the pipeline professions and ran as incumbents, the percentage of women in Congress would increase. Voter biases were shown to be obsolete, and the mantra that guided gender research in the 1990s touted that when women run for office, they win at equal rates as men (Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997).

When the number of women in Congress instead seemed to plateau, scholars directed their attention to the decision to run for office and discovered gender differences in political ambition. Lawless and Fox (2005, 2010) are the pioneers in this area. They find that women are less likely to consider running for office than their male counterparts. In a recent article, the authors report political ambition along party lines, and somewhat surprisingly, their data suggest that Republican and Democratic women do not have vastly different levels of ambition. They are equally likely to self-assess as very qualified to run for office (20%), and in fact, Democratic women are slightly more likely than Republican women to consider themselves to be not at all qualified (12% of Democrats; 10% of Republicans) (Fox and Lawless 2011, 64).

Nevertheless, the partisan makeup of the congressional pipeline has changed in similar ways as Congress, with the number of Democratic women in state legislatures increasing and the number of Republican women slightly decreasing. We might therefore expect to see partisan differences in women in Congress despite the fact that Democratic and Republican women have equal levels of ambition. But if we wanted to apply ambition theory to explore the partisan imbalance of women in state legislatures, we would have to posit an increase in ambition among Democratic women given that the number of women in the electorate identifying as Democrats has remained constant during this time. The theory is silent on partisan differences, however.

Two broader concerns arise when using the ambition argument to understand patterns of female representation in Congress. First, it fails to account for variation in political ambition across women. To be sure, this question is well beyond the scope of their analysis, as Lawless and Fox are trying to explain the general plateau of women in politics. Still, the emphasis on the negative gender coefficient has come at the expense of understanding when that coefficient can be insignificant or even positive. A second and related point is that ambition theory, at least as conceptualized within gender and politics, provides little insight into why the number of women candidates changes over time and across political contexts. The number of women candidates always pales in comparison to the number of men, but it is important to note that these figures do not remain constant between the two parties or across election cycles.

The third explanation for why there are so few women in elective office posits a role for political parties. Comparativists have long shown that leftist parties have higher percentages of women in office (e.g., Caul 1999; Kittilson 2006). In the American context, by contrast, the bulk of this scholarship is party-neutral (but see Elder 2008; Freeman 1987; Sanbonmatsu 2002), and the main argument is that both parties exclude women through recruitment and gate-keeping processes. Party leaders fail to recruit women candidates as often as they recruit men, and they screen ambitious women out of seats they believe women cannot win (Fox and Lawless 2010; Niven 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2006). Sanbonmatsu (2002) first recognized the need to disaggregate women by party by exploring the paths to state legislative office for Republican and Democratic women. In a study of state legislators, scholars at the Center for American Women and Politics found that Democratic women are more likely to be members of a women's organization than Republican women, though they note that parties are more influential sources of recruitment and show that the role of the parties was similar for Republican and Democratic women legislators (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and

Walsh 2009; Sanbonmatsu 2010). Elder (2012) recently suggested that the distinct party cultures foster the representation of Democratic women and inhibit the representation of Republican women (see Freeman 1987). Yet, in addition to these party-specific accounts, it is also important to consider within-party variation—why party leaders might recruit some women and not others or why they might believe some women are viable and others are not.

Lastly, existing partisan theories typically rely on data at the state and local level, but evidence for gendered recruitment and gate-keeping efforts in congressional races is sparser. Burrell even argues that, at the congressional level, “party organizations are no longer negative ‘gatekeepers’ for women candidates. Rather they have become positive forces” (1994, 99). In fact, Kanthak and Krause (2012) claim that Republican men in Congress are more supportive of their female copartisans than Democratic men in Congress because of the smaller numbers and token status of Republican women in the GOP caucus. It is thus not apparent whether party recruitment and gate-keeping mechanisms hinder women from running for Congress, and more importantly, how the two parties differentially affect the emergence of women candidates.

In sum, our leading explanations for why there are so few women in politics offer partial explanations for the partisan imbalance of women in Congress, but there are important gaps in these accounts as well. The predictions of the earliest structural arguments coincide with the increasing number of Democratic women, but they fail to explain the stagnation of women on the Republican side. The political ambition explanation is helpful for understanding the general plateau of women in Congress, but if we want to understand historical and partisan variation in the number of women holding congressional office, it is vital that our theories take the changing political context into consideration. Finally, although partisan accounts provide insight into how parties can influence candidate emergence, they do not make specific predictions about why recruitment and gate-keeping efforts may vary within and across the two parties.

### **Supply-Side and Demand-Side Explanations**

There are two additional empirical explanations that may account for this growing partisan disparity. A supply-side argument is that this trend mirrors changes in the electorate. Indeed, there has been a persistent gender gap in the public since 1980, with women more likely to

identify as Democrats (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Lin 2004). However, the partisan gap among women in Congress dwarfs that among women in the electorate: Democratic women have comprised between two-thirds and three-fourths of the women in Congress since the 1990s, while the partisan gap among women voters has ranged from 3% to 16% in presidential elections during this time. Nor has the partisan gap among women in the electorate continued to widen, and it was at its height in the 1996 election. Finally, the gender gap emerged because of the changing politics of men, not women. Men have become increasingly Republican while the partisanship of women has remained relatively stable since the 1960s (Carroll 2006; Huddy, Cassese, and Lizotte 2008; Kaufman and Petrocik 1999; Norrander 1999, 2008).

A possible demand-side argument is that Republican voters are biased against women. Elder (2008) demonstrates that regional party shifts have contributed to the partisan gap in Congress, though it is less clear whether voters and voter biases are to blame. While Democratic women who run for Congress do fare better than Republican women, this has typically been attributed to the fact that GOP women run in tougher races (Cooperman and Oppenheimer 2001; Evans 2005; Palmer and Simon 2008). Indeed, similarly situated Republican women win as often as Democratic women and Republican men (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Sanbonmatsu 2006), and Dolan (2004) finds that party and incumbency, not candidate gender, are the best predictors of vote choice. Lawless and Pearson (2008) also show that Republican women are as likely to win their primaries as Republican men.

Still, experimental data suggest that GOP voters are less supportive of women (King and Matland 2003), and perceived bias may deter Republican women from running. The evidence for this is slim, however, as the numbers of Republican and Democratic women who ran for Congress in 2010 were nearly equal. Most of the GOP women were very conservative challengers who did not win their primaries, but such widespread defeat is not clear indication of gender bias as only 13 of the 113 challengers had past state legislative experience (CAWP 2012). This does imply, though, that pure pipeline theories cannot fully explain the emergence of women candidates, as the number of GOP women in state legislatures has decreased over time (Palmer and Simon 2008). Moreover, this shows that the Republican Party does not repel all women, but rather that the women who do run for office are very ideologically conservative (Schreiber 2012, 2014). One thing these patterns highlight is the need for candidate ideology to be incorporated into gender and politics research.

### **Party Fit: How Political Ideology Matters for Women's Representation**

Candidate ideology has received little attention in the gender and politics literature, which is surprising given the growing divide between Democratic and Republican women and the growing similarity between male and female copartisans (Frederick 2009; Osborn 2012). This article extends our understanding of contemporary patterns of female representation by introducing the concept of party fit. The central claim is that candidate ideology—and more specifically, the congruence between a candidate's ideology and the ideological reputation of her party—influences the decision to run for office (Thomsen 2014). The party's reputation is about “what the party stands for—and acts on—in terms of policy” (Aldrich and Freeze 2011, 186; Snyder and Ting 2002). Party reputation is similar to Elder's (2012) use of party culture, but the concept of party fit differs in that it emphasizes the interaction between the candidate and the party. The added value of party fit is threefold: first, it accounts for within-party variation in levels of political ambition and party recruitment across women; second, it offers an explanation for the changing ideological profile among women in Congress; and third, it allows for a dynamic understanding of female representation that varies over time and across contexts.

There are two mechanisms by which party fit affects the type of candidate who seeks office: self-selection and party recruitment (Aldrich 2011). Potential candidates, male and female alike, will self-select into electoral contests if they believe they are a good fit for the party, and those who do not will instead abstain. Similarly, party leaders will recruit candidates they deem electorally viable and gatekeep candidates they do not (Sanbonmatsu 2006). It is difficult to distinguish between these two processes, and indeed, they are almost certainly mutually reinforcing. Due to the continued prominence of the candidate-centered model in American politics (Jacobson 2004; McGhee and Pearson 2011), I focus on the self-selection mechanism. However, the argument does not preclude a role for parties, and it is likely that party recruitment also shapes perceptions of party fit. In addition, the degree of party fit is relevant for incumbent and nonincumbent candidates, but because of the emphasis on candidate emergence in the gender and politics literature, I concentrate on the latter, and more specifically, on those in state legislative office because this is the traditional pathway to Congress.<sup>1</sup>

There are many reasons to expect that, regardless of gender, potential candidates rely on the party's ideological reputation to determine if they can achieve their electoral and policy goals (Fenno 1973;

Mayhew 1974).<sup>2</sup> First, potential candidates draw on this reputation to estimate their likelihood of winning. Sniderman and Stiglitz (2012) show that candidates receive a reputational premium if they take a position that is consistent with the policy outlook of their party, and those who are positioned to run for office use the party's reputation to evaluate their own chance of winning. Second, potential candidates rely on this reputation to assess their future policy impact and prospective influence in the legislative chamber (Fenno 1973). Members of Congress experience intense pressure to support the party's agenda, and those who defect can expect to be punished for their actions and denied party rewards (Sinclair 2006; Theriault 2008).

Over the past 30 years, congressional elections have become increasingly nationalized (Herrnson 2004), and the reputations of both parties have been dramatically affected by the rise in partisan polarization.<sup>3</sup> Ideological moderates are a rarity in Congress, and moderates in the congressional pipeline may assume their candidacies are doomed from the start (Brady, Han, and Pope 2007) and that they would be unlikely to achieve their nonelectoral goals if elected to office. Party leaders who set the legislative agenda are now ideologues themselves (Heberlig et al. 2006; Jessee and Malhotra 2011), and it would be difficult for moderates to either advance their desired policies or obtain a leadership position in Congress.

Thus, the party fit hypothesis suggests that in the contemporary context, ideological moderates in the congressional pipeline—liberal Republican and conservative Democratic state legislators—are less likely to run for Congress than those at the ideological poles. The size of the effect may differ by party due to the fact that the Democratic Party delegation has remained relatively more ideologically dispersed than the Republican delegation (Bonica 2013). The theoretical framework is not gender specific, but the rise in partisan polarization is expected to have a disproportionate effect on Republican women for two reasons. First, Republican women in the congressional pipeline have historically been to the left of their male copartisans (e.g., Carroll 2003; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Epstein, Niemi, and Powell 2005; Poggione 2004; but see Hogan 2008).<sup>4</sup> Data from the Candidate Emergence Study (CES) (Maestas et al. 2006) similarly show that 22% of female Republican state legislators identify as liberal, slightly liberal, or middle of the road, compared to 8% of male Republicans ( $p < 0.01$ ). In other words, Republican women in the CES dataset are nearly three times as likely as their male counterparts to be ideologically moderate. On top of these ideological differences, women candidates are perceived to be more liberal than they actually are (Koch 2002; see King and Matland 2003).

The second and perhaps more important reason why recent partisan shifts are expected to have a disproportionate impact on Republican women is that there is a dearth of conservative women in the pipeline.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the number of Republican women holding state legislative office is small, regardless of ideology. There are only 59 Republican women in the CES dataset, compared to 330 Republican men. Even so, the pool of conservative Republican women in the pipeline pales in comparison to that of Republican men. Of the 270 Republican state legislators who identify as conservative or very conservative, 234 are men and a mere 36 are women. In other words, women comprise 13% of the pool of ideologically suitable potential candidates, which is a close match with actual figures of female representation in the Republican Party (8%).

Similar gendered ideological disparities appear in both parties, with Republican as well as Democratic women to the left of their male copartisans, though these recent partisan trends are expected to differentially affect Republican and Democratic women. Furthermore, given that female Democratic state legislators are less likely to be ideologically moderate than Democratic men ( $p < 0.01$ ), a slight shift to the left by the Democratic Party might even benefit Democratic women. Indeed, there is evidence suggesting that Democratic women are more likely to win their primaries than Democratic men (Lawless and Pearson 2008).

Scholars have largely focused on comparisons between male and female candidates, but as Schreiber notes, “We know little about the differences among women who seek elective positions of power” (2012, 550). The party fit framework offers an ideological rationale for how the GOP’s reputation might operate differently across Republican women, attracting conservative women and deterring moderate women from running. It does not preclude the possibility that the Republican Party can recruit conservative women candidates, and if the GOP decides it is worthwhile to run more women, there are plenty of conservative women in the public it could recruit. The argument here is quite different, though. The theory suggests that the probability that a “Republican type” will be elected to Congress and be a woman is low, because there is a dearth of conservative Republican women in state legislative office who are well situated to run for Congress. Simply put, there are many more Republican men who satisfy this condition, which makes them much more likely to run for Congress. The next step is to test the argument by exploring perceptions of state legislators and ideological differences among those who run.

### Data and Method

State legislative office is a well-known springboard to Congress (Jacobson and Kernell 1983), and 51% of those who served in Congress between 1999 and 2008 had prior state legislative experience (Carnes 2012). Importantly, there is no significant gender difference in the percentage of MCs with state legislative experience: 50% of men and 55% of women have state legislative backgrounds. Nor are there any partisan differences, as 51% of Democrats and 52% of Republicans have held state legislative office (Carnes 2012). I first draw on data from the Candidate Emergence Study (Maestas et al. 2006; Stone, Maisel, and Maestas 2004), a national survey of state legislators. The CES data are unique in that they allow for an analysis of the perceptions of state legislators. The survey was mailed to state legislators whose districts overlap with 200 randomly selected congressional districts in 41 states. There are 560 state legislators, 273 Republicans and 287 Democrats, in the sample used here.<sup>6</sup> Again, the party fit hypothesis suggests that ideological moderates in the pipeline say they are less likely to run for Congress than those at the poles. The magnitude of the effect may differ by party due to variation in the ideological heterogeneity of the two parties.

I use a logistic regression to estimate the effect of state legislator ideology on their chance of running for the US House. The dependent variable is measured as the state legislator's attraction to a congressional career and his or her subjective likelihood of running for a congressional seat in the next election cycle, within three or four terms, or in the foreseeable future.<sup>7</sup> Approximately half of the sample is attracted to a career in the House and one-fourth of respondents are at least somewhat likely to run, and there is no significant partisan difference in either case. The main independent variable of interest is the state legislator's self-reported ideology, which ranges from very liberal to very conservative. Higher values correspond to Republican liberalism and Democratic conservatism. Although I do not posit an additional decrease in attraction to a House seat among moderate women, past research shows that women are perceived to be more liberal than they actually are, which might depress the desire to run for office for moderate Republican women in particular. To check for this, I also interact state legislator ideology with gender to examine the joint effect of gender and ideology.

I control for a host of variables that might also influence the decision to run for Congress. In particular, I account for the "opportunity structure," which has long been shown to matter for the decision to run for office (e.g., Black 1972; Rohde 1979; Schlesinger 1966). The opportunity structure is shaped by the probability of winning, the benefits

associated with the office, and the costs of running. First, the state legislator's ideological fit with the congressional district is likely to bear on this decision, and I include a measure of the state legislator's direct assessment of winning the party nomination in the next election cycle, in the next three to four terms, or in the foreseeable future.<sup>8</sup> State legislators who have been contacted by the party are also expected to be more likely to run for Congress. Second, the benefits of the office were measured by their evaluations of the prestige and effectiveness of a career in the US House and the legislature in which they currently serve. These two evaluations were combined, and the difference between them is a measure of the relative value of a House seat. Third, those in professionalized state legislatures may perceive the costs of running to be higher, whereas the costs may be lower for state legislators who face term limits. In addition, as family costs and campaign costs increase, attraction to a House seat is expected to decrease.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, the model includes controls for the state legislator's gender and age.

## Results

The results with the CES data are presented in Table 1. This section focuses on the main independent variable, state legislator ideology, and then briefly reports the results on the control variables. The key finding in the Republican model is that liberal Republican state legislators rate their attraction to a congressional career and their likelihood of running for Congress as lower than those who are ideologically conservative.<sup>10</sup> The coefficients for moderate Democrats are also negative, but they do not reach conventional levels of significance.<sup>11</sup> However, the lack of significance among Democrats makes sense given the timing of the survey. This wave of the CES survey was conducted in 1998, and there were important ideological differences between the parties at that point. In the 105th Congress (1997–98), the median House Republican had a CFscore of 0.80 and the median Democrat had a score of  $-0.65$ , compared to 0.94 and  $-0.79$  for the median Republican and Democrat, respectively, in the 112th Congress (2011–12). Also, the standard deviation of the GOP in the 105th Congress was 0.27, whereas the Democratic Party had a standard deviation of 0.33. Nonliberal Democrats were thus a better fit for the party in the late 1990s, and furthermore, the party might not have seemed as distant because of the relative heterogeneity of the party caucus.

To better understand the gender dynamics, I estimated how their attraction to a career in the House and estimated likelihood of running varies by ideology and gender. The chance that any legislator will run

TABLE 1  
State Legislators' Perceptions of Congressional Office, by Party

	Republican State Legislators		Democratic State Legislators	
	Attraction to US House Seat	Likelihood of Running	Attraction to US House Seat	Likelihood of Running
State Legislator Ideology (Republican Liberalism; Democratic Conservatism)	-0.42* (0.17)	-0.39† (0.23)	-0.06 (0.17)	-0.14 (0.23)
Ideological Distance from Voters in House District	-0.34** (0.17)	-0.68** (0.22)	0.26 (0.17)	-0.21 (0.22)
Chance of Winning Party Nomination	0.48** (0.16)	0.65** (0.20)	0.26† (0.15)	0.80** (0.18)
Contacted by Political Party	0.47* (0.21)	0.55** (0.19)	0.30† (0.16)	0.13 (0.16)
Relative Value of House Seat	0.15 (0.16)	0.29 (0.20)	0.20 (0.14)	0.14 (0.17)
Serves in Professional Legislature	0.02 (0.16)	-0.18 (0.19)	-0.13 (0.14)	-0.08 (0.17)
Faces Term Limits	-0.26 (0.33)	0.20 (0.41)	0.21 (0.29)	0.30 (0.34)
Campaign Cost Index	-0.12 (0.18)	-0.20 (0.22)	-0.40* (0.16)	-0.12 (0.18)
Family Cost Index	-0.56** (0.17)	-0.55* (0.21)	-0.40* (0.16)	-0.51* (0.20)
Woman	-0.62 (0.47)	-0.02 (0.58)	-0.47 (0.33)	0.05 (0.41)
Age	-0.93** (0.18)	-1.29** (0.23)	-0.82** (0.16)	-0.94** (0.19)
Constant	0.11 (0.20)	-2.01* (0.31)	0.05 (0.18)	-1.66** (0.25)
Number of Observations	275	273	302	287
Log-Likelihood	-133.42	-95.90	-169.44	-122.47

Source: Candidate Emergence Study (Maestas et al. 2006; Stone et al. 2004).

Note: Entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is 1 if the legislator is attracted to a career in the US House and 0 if not and 1 if the legislator is likely to run for a seat in the US House and 0 if not. \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; † $p < 0.10$ .

for Congress is low, but a shift in ideology from extremely conservative to middle of the road decreases the attraction to a congressional career from 0.70 to 0.31, and their subjective likelihood of running decreases from 0.21 to 0.06.<sup>12</sup> Among those in the CES dataset, ideological differences greatly outweigh gender differences, and it does not appear that candidate gender has an additional effect that is independent of ideology.<sup>13</sup> Reported attraction to a congressional career is 0.70 for extremely conservative male state legislators and 0.55 for extremely conservative female state legislators, and the subjective likelihood of running is 0.21 and 0.20 for extremely conservative male and female state legislators, respectively (in neither case are they statistically different). These figures are much larger than the assessments of middle-of-the-road Republicans, which are also virtually the same for men and women. For ideological moderates, attraction to a congressional career is 0.31 and 0.19 for men and women, respectively, and the likelihood of running is 0.06 for men and 0.05 for women. Because of the relatively small sample size, we should not dismiss the possibility of gender and ideology interaction effects, but the findings are instructive of how gender might increasingly operate in less obvious and unexpected ways. Again, the reason that party fit has implications for Republican women is twofold: first, Republican women are more likely to be moderates, and second, there is a dearth of conservative women in the pipeline.

The control variables reflect the expectations outlined above. For Republican state legislators, their ideological fit with the district, ability to win the nomination, reported contact from the party, estimated family costs, and age affect their attraction to a congressional career and their likelihood of seeking higher office. We see similar results on the Democratic side. For Democrats, the perceived chance of winning the nomination, contact from the party, estimated campaign costs and family costs, and age matter for the outcome variables as well.<sup>14</sup> Gender is statistically insignificant across the models. This conforms to Fulton et al.'s (2006) finding, as well as Lawless and Fox's (2010) result, that sex is not a determinant of actually running among those who have already considered a candidacy.<sup>15</sup>

In sum, traditional factors such as recruitment, the ability to garner voter support, and the costs of running matter in clear ways for the decision to seek higher office. However, scholars have overlooked how the ideology of the state legislator may also influence candidate emergence. The findings suggest that liberal Republicans in the pipeline are less likely to be attracted to and less likely to run for a US House seat than conservative state legislators. Conservative and liberal Democrats in the

pipeline are indistinguishable, but again, this makes sense given the ideological makeup of the Democratic Party at the time of the survey.

### **The Implications of Party Fit for Candidate Emergence**

The CES data help to shed light on the perceptions of state legislators, but it would also be useful to analyze the ideological profile of state legislators who decide to run for Congress, as we are ultimately interested in how patterns of candidate self-selection contribute to the growing partisan gap. In addition, because this disparity has increased gradually and over multiple election cycles, it would be ideal to test the party fit hypothesis with more recent data and data that span a longer time period. A new dataset created by Bonica (2014) allows us to do both. Bonica (2014) uses campaign finance records from state and federal elections to estimate the ideology of a wide range of political actors, including members of Congress, state legislators, interest groups, and individual donors. Most importantly here, the dataset includes ideal points for state legislators who did and did not run for Congress from 2000 to 2010.<sup>16</sup> This enables a test of party fit specifically in the polarized context, as partisan polarization had become a defining characteristic of Congress during these years.<sup>17</sup>

I use a logistic regression to estimate the relationship between state legislator ideology and her decision to run for Congress. The Republican model includes 14,459 observations, and the Democratic model includes 16,571 observations.<sup>18</sup> The dependent variable is coded 1 if the state legislator runs for Congress in a given year and 0 if she runs for the state legislature again. The primary independent variable is the ideology of the state legislator, coded so that higher values correspond to Republican liberalism and Democratic conservatism. I include a variable for candidate gender to examine the role of both gender and ideology. The party fit hypothesis suggests that, regardless of gender, Republican liberalism and Democratic conservatism have a negative effect on candidate emergence: the more liberal (conservative) the Republican (Democratic) state legislator, the less likely she is to run for Congress.

The model includes controls for a variety of electoral, institutional, and partisan factors.<sup>19</sup> Palmer and Simon (2008) and Elder (2008) have previously shown that district and regional characteristics shape patterns of female representation. I account for district ideology with Tausanovitch and Warshaw's (2013) measures of the ideology of voters in the state legislator's congressional district.<sup>20</sup> In light of Elder's (2008) findings, I include a dummy variable for southern states and also for whether the district is majority-minority. Given the sizeable incumbency

advantage in American politics, I control for whether there was an incumbent running for reelection in the district as well as the Bonica ideology score of the incumbent, as extreme incumbents may have a more difficult time with reelection (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002). In addition, I calculated the average amount of money individuals raised as state legislators from Bonica's data, as this likely corresponds to their ability to fund a congressional campaign, and I control for the number of times individuals sought state legislative office to capture their experience as candidates. The type of primary election system may also matter, as ideological moderates may be less likely to run in states with closed primaries and more likely to do so in states with open primaries. I therefore control for primary type and interact it with state legislator ideology. Lastly, state legislative professionalization is measured with the Squire (2007) index, and I include measures of partisan control of the state legislature (Klarner 2013) and whether the state legislature has term limits.

The results are presented in Table 2. Of most importance is the negative coefficient on the state legislator ideology variable. As expected, Republican liberalism and Democratic conservatism has a negative effect on candidate emergence: the more liberal the Republican state legislator, the less likely she is to run for Congress; the more conservative the Democratic state legislator, the less likely she is to do so.

To further explore within-party gender differences, Figure 2 presents the predicted probability of running for Congress for male and female Republican state legislators across a range of ideology scores.<sup>21</sup> The patterns are remarkably similar for both men and women in the congressional pipeline, and the confidence intervals overlap across all values of male and female state legislator ideology.<sup>22</sup> Figure 2 also shows the probabilities of running for Congress for state legislators who have the same ideology scores as former and current members of Congress, including moderates like Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Steven LaTourette (R-OH) and conservatives like Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and Paul Ryan (R-WI). The difference between moderate and conservative Republicans is striking. The probability that a moderate female state legislator resembling Olympia Snowe runs for Congress is 0.1%, compared to 1.3% for a conservative woman resembling Marsha Blackburn. In other words, the probability that a state legislator like Blackburn runs for Congress is 13 times greater than that of a state legislator like Olympia Snowe. Similarly, the probability that a conservative male state legislator like Paul Ryan runs for Congress is 1.8% versus 0.2% for a moderate like Steven LaTourette.<sup>23</sup> Again, the primary divide is along ideological rather than gender lines.

TABLE 2  
The Determinants of Running for Congress, by Party (2000–2010)

Variable	Republican State Legislators	Democratic State Legislators
State Legislator Ideology (Republican Liberalism; Democratic Conservatism)	-3.51** (0.44)	-3.19** (0.32)
Woman	-0.17 (0.17)	-0.49** (0.17)
Incumbent Running in Congressional District	-2.33** (0.13)	-2.38** (0.17)
Incumbent Ideology (Higher=Extreme)	-0.13 (0.26)	-1.05** (0.33)
Ideology of Congressional District (Higher=Conservative)	-1.80** (0.37)	0.94* (0.37)
South	0.25 (0.18)	1.76** (0.25)
Majority-Minority Congressional District	-0.24 (0.33)	0.35 (0.21)
Log of Mean Receipts Raised as State Legislator	0.46** (0.07)	0.45** (0.08)
Number of Times Run for State Legislature	0.37** (0.05)	0.40** (0.05)
In Professionalized State Legislature	2.00** (0.68)	1.96** (0.76)
Democratic Control of State Legislature	0.99** (0.19)	-0.28 (0.22)
In State Legislature with Term Limits	0.88** (0.15)	0.91** (0.19)
Closed Primary	0.89* (0.44)	0.14 (0.33)
Closed Primary × State Legislator Ideology	0.35 (0.51)	-0.07 (0.40)
Open Primary	0.33 (0.67)	0.26 (0.35)
Open Primary × State Legislator Ideology	0.39 (0.72)	0.40 (0.38)
Constant	-12.56** (1.03)	-11.53** (0.99)
Number of Observations	14,459	16,571
Log-Likelihood	-1110.55	-834.85

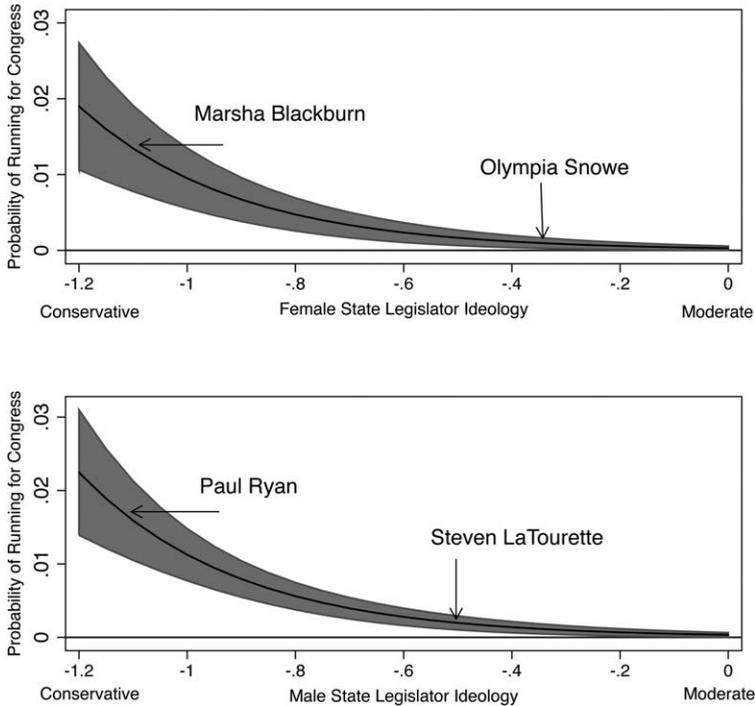
Source: State legislator estimates from Bonica (2014).

Note: Entries are logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors clustered by individual in parentheses. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the incumbent state legislator ran for Congress and 0 if the incumbent legislator instead ran for the state legislature. The model includes year fixed effects.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

For Democratic state legislators, the coefficient on the ideology variable is also statistically significant. Figure 3 illustrates the predicted probability of running for Congress for Democratic male and female state legislators across a range of ideology scores. We can again use the ideology scores of Democratic members of Congress to calculate the predicted probability of running for Congress for state legislators who resemble moderates like Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) and Bart Gordon (D-TN) or liberals like Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Michael Capuano (D-MA). The probabilities differ slightly because Democratic state legislators are less likely to run for Congress than Republicans. The

FIGURE 2  
 Predicted Probability of Running for Congress for Republican State Legislators, Across Male and Female State Legislators (2000–10)

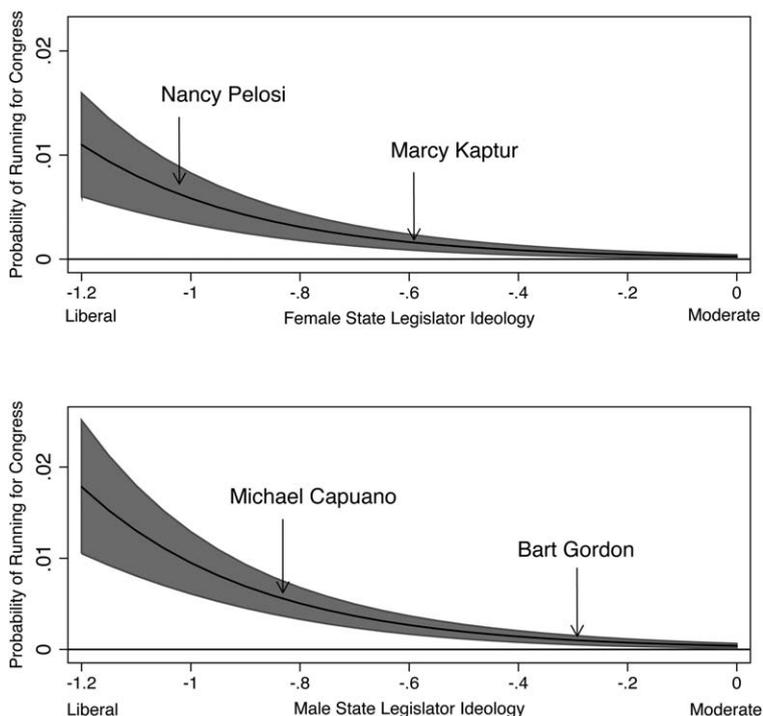


Source: State legislator estimates from Bonica (2014).  
 Note: The arrows refer to hypothetical state legislators that have the same ideological scores as various former and current members of Congress. For example, the arrow corresponding to Olympia Snowe represents the probability of running for Congress for a state legislator who has the same ideology score as Snowe.

probability that a liberal female state legislator who resembles Pelosi runs for Congress is 0.6%, compared to 0.2% for a moderate female state legislator who resembles Kaptur. For a liberal male legislator like Capuano and a moderate like Gordon, the probability of seeking congressional office is 0.6% and 0.1%, respectively.

In terms of the controls, the probability of running is lower for Republican and Democratic state legislators in districts with incumbents running for reelection. Republican (Democratic) state legislators that are nested in conservative congressional districts are less (more) likely to

FIGURE 3  
 Predicted Probability of Running for Congress for Democratic State Legislators, Across Male and Female State Legislators (2000–10)



Source: State legislator estimates from Bonica (2014).

Note: The arrows refer to hypothetical state legislators that have the same ideological scores as various former and current members of Congress. For example, the arrow corresponding to Marcy Kaptur represents the probability of running for Congress for a state legislator who has the same ideology score as Kaptur.

run for Congress, perhaps because they expect more (less) primary competition. In both models, the probability of running for Congress is higher for those who raised more money as state legislators and those with more state legislative experience, as well as for those in professionalized state legislatures and in state legislatures with term limits. Some of the results do differ by party, though. South is positive and significant for Democrats, and Democratic state legislators are actually less likely to run for Congress when the incumbent is ideologically extreme.<sup>24</sup> Republicans in state legislatures with higher levels of Democratic control are

more likely to run for higher office, and Republicans are also more likely to do so in states with closed primaries. However, the interaction between primary type and legislator ideology is insignificant across the models, which conforms to recent findings suggesting that primary type is not related to legislator extremism (McGhee et al. 2014). Finally, Democratic women are less likely to run than Democratic men, highlighting the fact that rates of female representation can still increase despite a negative gender coefficient. I discuss the implications of this result more below.

Taken together, the findings suggest that scholars must consider how ideology and gender interact to shape candidate emergence. In addition to the fact that moderate Republicans are increasingly less likely to run for Congress, GOP women are overrepresented at the moderate end of the ideological spectrum, and there are also comparatively few conservative women in the congressional pipeline. Among the 7,200 Republican state legislators in the Bonica dataset who were in the conservative half of the Republican pool between 2000 and 2010, only about 1,100 of them were women. In this group of conservative Republicans, 27 women and 164 men actually ran for Congress, or 2.3% and 2.7% of the pool, respectively (these differences are not significant).

The good news, then, is that if either the spectrum of ideologically suitable Republican candidates were to widen or if the number of conservative Republican women in state legislatures were to increase, the partisan imbalance of women in Congress would diminish. For one, if the moderate Republican women were as likely to run for office as their conservative female counterparts, the number of moderate women running would be predicted to increase by 69%, from 20 women to 29 women. But perhaps more importantly, if women comprised half or even one-third of the pool of conservative Republican state legislators during this time period, the number of Republican women running for Congress would be expected to increase to 83 and 55, respectively. In other words, the total number of GOP women running for Congress could double or triple from the level here. Given that state legislative office has long been the traditional pipeline to national office, having more female Republican state legislators run for Congress, and particularly conservative Republican women, would likely be an effective way to increase women's representation.

By comparison, although Democratic female state legislators are less likely to run for Congress than their male counterparts, their level of representation has increased dramatically. Unlike GOP women, Democratic women comprised more than one-third of the liberal half of the candidate pool from 2000 to 2010. Of the 2,900 Democratic women in

the liberal half of the pool, 55, or 1.9%, of them actually ran, compared to 106, or 2.0%, of the 5,300 Democratic men in the liberal half of the pool. In fact, the gender disparity on the Democratic side comes from higher rates of candidate emergence among moderate Democratic men compared to moderate Democratic women, though the substantive differences are not large. Specifically, there were seven Democratic women in the moderate half of the pool who ran for Congress, compared to 40 moderate Democratic men, or 0.4% and 0.6% of the moderate female and male pools, respectively. However, the sizeable numeric presence of women in the liberal half of the pool means that there is a large supply of Democratic women candidates who are well situated and well suited to run for higher office. These gendered-ideological disparities in the makeup of the candidate pool have important implications for the partisan gap among women in Congress.

### Discussion

This article has three main implications for the study of women and politics. First and foremost, the party fit framework is a third prong in the larger story of why there are so few women in office. The argument differs from both the ambition and party recruitment rationales for women's underrepresentation as it seeks to account for the growing partisan disparity among women in Congress by placing ideology front and center. There have been dramatic ideological changes in the type of candidate that is elected in the contemporary political context, and potential candidates, male and female alike, are inclined to take note of this shift. As such, the framework also offers a new micro-level explanation for why some women candidates select into electoral contests and others do not. The analyses highlight within-party variation across women with respect to candidate emergence, and the findings demonstrate that ideological moderates are less likely to run for office than those at the poles.

Second, an eventual consequence of the rise in asymmetric polarization is that moderate Republican women will be largely absent from the policymaking process. We have seen this unfolding over the last 20 years, with fewer and fewer moderate Republican women (and moderate Republicans in general) holding congressional office, and those who lasted the longest, such as Marge Roukema (R-NJ), Nancy Johnson (R-CT), and Olympia Snowe (R-ME), moved to the right during their tenure (see also Swers 2013). Swers (2002) found that Republican women were still more likely to support women's issues in the 104th Congress, but there were only a few conservative women

in her sample at that point. In later work, Swers and Larson (2005) identify different Republican women “archetypes.” The party fit framework explains why one of these archetypes—the conservative Republican woman—can succeed in an increasingly conservative and homogeneous Republican Party. This new cadre of conservative women that has emerged on the Republican side is likely to address women’s issues from a traditional and conservative perspective (Dodson 2006; Evans 2005; Swers 2002).

Third, the theory offers an additional explanation for why Republican male and female officeholders have become more ideologically similar over time (Frederick 2009; Hogan 2008; see Osborn 2012 for a comprehensive treatment). Although Republican women have historically been more moderate than Republican men, there is also evidence suggesting that Republican women in both state legislative and congressional office have shifted to the right over the past 30 years (Carroll 2003; Evans 2005; Frederick 2009). This is exactly what we would expect if moderate Republican women have increasingly abstained from electoral politics. Moreover, if the party fit argument is right, the growing number of conservative women in the congressional pipeline bodes well for the representation of Republican women in Congress. As Republican women in state legislative office become a better fit for the congressional party delegation, the partisan disparity among women in Congress should fade and patterns of women’s representation in both parties should follow similar trajectories.

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## NOTES

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1. Specifically, incumbents who are ideological nonconformists are expected to be more likely to retire than those who conform to the party mainstream. The difference

in retirement rates is beyond the scope of this article, but it also contributes to the partisan imbalance among women in Congress. In fact, only two of the 19 Republican women currently in Congress have been in office since before 2000.

2. Potential candidates can learn about the party's reputation through a variety of ways, such as polls, the media, and past candidates, but the ideological makeup of the party delegation is the best measure of the party's reputation. What is important is that this reputation provides different information than just knowing the ideology of the district.

3. On a 7-point scale ranging from very liberal to very conservative, Americans currently rate the Democratic Party as 2.8 and the Republican Party as 5.3 (ANES 2012). However, the two parties used to be perceived as closer to the ideological center; in 1972, for example, the Democratic and Republican parties were rated as 3.1 and 4.9, respectively. It is safe to assume that if the public recognizes these differences in the parties, potential candidates do as well.

4. Carroll (2003) suggests this is changing, with women becoming increasingly conservative. In a comprehensive analysis of state legislators, Osborn (2012) shows that partisanship matters much more than gender for understanding how legislators address women's issues.

5. My interest is in the available candidate pool, so why there are so few conservative Republican women state legislators is not of critical importance. However, the conservative shift among GOP female state legislators is consistent with the argument here (Carroll 2003; Osborn 2012).

6. The data are drawn from the 1998 wave of the Candidate Emergence Study. The specific states are not identified in the publicly available data. The survey was mailed to 2,714 state legislators, and 874 of them responded, for a response rate of 32.2% (Maestas et al. 2006, 199). Due to missing data, there are 597 respondents in the Maestas et al. (2006) study, compared to 560 used here; the decrease is because of the inclusion of ideology. I tried multiple imputation to deal with missing data, and the results remain the same (see Table A3). I am not able to use the 2000 wave of the CES, as ideology was not included in the survey. Maestas et al. (2006) also use only the 1998 wave in their study of state legislators.

7. The first dependent variable is coded as 1 if they rate their attraction to a career in the US House as at least somewhat high, and the second is coded as 1 if they are at least somewhat likely to run for Congress in the upcoming election, in the next three or four terms, or in the foreseeable future. If state legislators rate these as a toss-up or below, it is relatively safe to assume they are unlikely to run given the sizeable costs involved in seeking office. The measures are intended to capture even the slightest inclination of running for Congress. The two variables are correlated at 0.4, which suggests that these are distinct but related concepts. Summary statistics of all variables are provided in Table A1.

8. The legislator's fit with her district is measured as the absolute distance between the individual's ideology and the perceived ideology of voters in the House district, both of which are on a 7-point scale. Her probability of winning is an index of whether she rates herself as at least somewhat likely to win the party nomination in the upcoming election, in the next three or four terms, and in the foreseeable future.

9. These measures, as well as the party contact and relative seat value variables, are from Maestas et al. (2006). The Family Cost index is an average of three responses

assessing how much the “loss of personal and family privacy,” “loss of leisure time,” and “separation from family and friends” discourage the state legislator from running for the US House. The Campaign Cost index is an average of two responses assessing the need to raise large amounts of money and enduring negative advertising attacks. Each response is on a 4-point scale that ranges from “makes no difference” to “strongly discourage.”

10. Results with the full sample are provided in Table A2. For Republicans, the relationship between state legislator ideology and both dependent variables is stronger when the control variables are omitted from the model ( $p < 0.01$ ); for Democrats, the relationship remains insignificant when the controls are omitted. I also examined legislator ideology in terms of their policy preferences, and the results are similar to those in Table 1: Republican state legislators with policy preferences that do not conform to the party platform report lower levels of attraction to a House seat and likelihood of running. I additionally explored whether those who are moderate on women’s issues (education funding and abortion rights) are less likely to be attracted to a House seat and less likely to run for office, but being a moderate on women’s policy issues does not influence the outcome variables. Like the general policy moderate variable, the coefficient is negative, which is not surprising given that ideology is increasingly coherent across a range of policies, but it is not statistically significant.

11. I am not able to test whether moderates self-select out of running or are gatekept out by party leaders, but I expect both mechanisms to be at work. A smaller percentage of moderate Republicans report being contacted by the party (1.3% of moderates vs. 4.4% of conservatives), which conforms to the argument here. (Equal percentages of moderate and liberal Democrats—3.9%—report being contacted.) The dependent variables used in the model here conform more closely to what I ultimately seek to explain.

12. Predictor variables were standardized to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.

13. Given that the interaction term is not significant, I exclude it from the models (the results are provided in Table A2).

14. Gender-party differentiated distributions in the control variables are in line with the argument here. In other work, I show that moderate Republicans are less likely to believe they can win the primary than their conservative counterparts (Thomsen 2014). Yet, it is important to note that there is no significant gender difference in the perceived chance of winning within moderate and nonmoderate state legislators in either party. In terms of the model, this would lead me to underestimate the effect of ideology as candidate ideology might have an influence on their ability to win but not vice versa, as the ideology of most legislators does not change significantly over time (Poole and Rosenthal 2007). Also, Republican women are not significantly different from Democratic women in terms of their perceived probability of winning, perceived distance from voters, and reported contact from the party. Republican women are more likely than both Democratic women and Republican men to be older and report higher family costs. Importantly, however, moderate Republican women are also more likely to do so than moderate Republican men, yet both have statistically indistinguishable probabilities of running (see Table 2). Despite these differences, then, it seems that these factors matter less for the actual decision to run.

15. I also interacted perceived chance of winning and candidate sex to examine if this relationship works in different ways for Republican women and men, but the interaction was not significant.

16. The goal was to restrict the sample to “quality congressional candidates” who do and do not run for Congress (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Thus, the sample includes state legislative incumbents who make their first run for Congress and state legislative incumbents who run for the state legislature again but could have run for Congress. The sample excludes first-time state legislative candidates who are not yet quality candidates, those who have previously run for the state legislature and lost, as well as state legislators who seek higher state legislative office. The sample also excludes state legislative incumbents who have previously run for Congress, as the aim is to compare the decision to run for Congress across similarly situated state legislators.

17. Bonica’s state legislator estimates are available from 1990 to 2010, but I restrict the sample from 2000 to 2010. The number of state legislative candidates who filed with the FEC was significantly lower prior to 2000, so the number of state legislators in the dataset who could have run for office was unreasonably low. Specifically, there are 8,027 observations in the dataset between 1990 and 1998, compared to 29,637 between 2000 and 2010. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, there are 7,300 state legislators nationwide in a given election cycle, so the latter figure is a much closer approximation of the eligible pool of state legislators (NCSL 2013).

18. The state legislators represent 49 states; Nebraska is excluded because its legislature is nonpartisan. Of the pool of Republican state legislators who were well situated for Congress in a given election year from 2000 to 2010, 290 (2.0%) ran for Congress and 14,169 did not. In the pool of Democratic state legislators, 208 (1.3%) ran for Congress and 16,363 did not. I also ran a rare event logistic regression, and the results are identical. In addition, I ran the model with state fixed effects, and the results remain the same. State fixed effects are not included here because doing so leads to a sizeable decrease in the number of observations, but year fixed effects are included.

19. I used Census data to assign state legislative districts (SLD) to their corresponding congressional district (CD). For SLDs that fall into more than one CD, I used the CD in which their SLD comprised a larger portion of the CD population. The incumbency data were generously provided by Gary Jacobson.

20. The district ideology estimates and the Bonica candidate estimates are not on the same scale, so I am unable to calculate the distance between the two.

21. All other variables are set at their mean or mode.

22. In light of Elder’s (2008) findings, I also ran the models by region to ensure that the South and the Northeast are not driving the results. The results on the ideology variable remain the same across models.

23. For a hypothetical man with Blackburn’s (Snowe’s) ideology score, the probability of running for Congress is 1.5% (0.1%). For a hypothetical woman with Ryan’s (LaTourette’s) ideology score, the probability of running for Congress is 1.5% (0.2%). However, the confidence intervals overlap for men and women across all values of ideology.

24. It might be the case that extreme incumbents are more likely to lose, as suggested by Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan (2002), but this is probably less true today than in the period used in their analysis (1956–96).

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### Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

Table A1. Summary Statistics (Republican State Legislators)

Table A1. Summary Statistics (Democratic State Legislators)

Table A2. The Determinants of State Legislators' Attraction to a Career in the U.S. House, Full Sample and With Moderate Woman Interaction (Table 1)

Table A3. The Determinants of State Legislators' Attraction to a Career in the U.S. House, With Legislator Ideology Measured as Policy Preferences (Table 1)

Table A4. The Determinants of Running for Congress, By Party and Region (Table 2)