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Madam President, BA: Women's ascent to power in College Democrats of Oregon

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Abstract

Founded in 2013, College Democrats of Oregon (CDO) is one of 47 state federations under the official youth branch of the Democratic Party, College Democrats of America. For several years, the majority of leadership positions in the organization have been held by women. Scholarship has established that women are at a distinctly gendered disadvantage when running for office, and this study shows its roots begin in student-led political parties like College Democrats, even when women's leadership seems to thrive. Interviews conducted with current and former women officeholders in CDO have shown that despite the abundance of female leadership, women still experience hesitancy to run. Furthermore, socioeconomic status can either positively or negatively influence a woman's sense of qualification and availability for involvement. What has moved to women to run for office in their chapter and the state is direct recruitment by those in power and appointment to office.

Keywords

College, Politics, Women in politics, College democrats, Democratic

Peer Review

This work has undergone a double-blind review by a minimum of two faculty members from institutions of higher learning from around the world. The faculty reviewers have expertise in disciplines closely related to those represented by this work. If possible, the work was also reviewed by undergraduates in collaboration with the faculty reviewers.

Women candidates for elective office are assumed to have to navigate a world in which their sex is obvious and consequential.¹

Preface

College Democrats has served as the single most influential organization in my college career. I come from a divorced, low income, and politically disengaged family in a conservative small town. I am the first in my family to go to college. I have never had an internship, and I did not work on a campaign until my junior year. Nothing about my story sets me up to be a successful political leader, but the people around me in College Democrats have.

A friend, Olivia, introduced me to College Democrats in the spring semester of my freshman year. Our chapter was small, but the people were passionate. I saw the potential in each of our members to do great things for our community. And, suddenly, I saw the potential within myself to do the same. I asked the outgoing vice president of our chapter for advice about running for a chapter position at next month's elections. Her encouragement allayed my hesitation to run for political director of our chapter. Olivia's and my stars rose together in College Democrats, and she introduced me to her network with the state board. Spring sophomore year, as Olivia was being groomed by that board to be the next president, I was encouraged to run for political director. Despite not having the traditional experience associated with a state board position, the direct support from Olivia and those in power at the state level made me feel competent and qualified to run for political director. I won my election in April and in May was approached to run for national council secretary of College Democrats of America (CDA) by the chief of staff of the political

department. I was wholly unfamiliar with the organization but trusted his word that I would be running with a slate of good people who would help me through this campaign. He was right, and I was elected.

Two months after my election, I started planning my next move: running for president of CDA. I knew I had the vision, the plans—and most importantly—the support, to mount a successful campaign. But was I qualified enough? Did I actually want to do the work? Or did I just want the title? Was I being too ambitious? Olivia listened carefully as I cried, fearful I was letting my ego get in the way of my heart. I swore off running for anything higher than national council chair. I knew I had upward mobility, but that glass ceiling was not mine to shatter. A month later, Ridgley, CDA's communications director, called me and asked me to be his vice president. After many conversations, I accepted. I had been asked to join; my fears of being too ambitious were assuaged. When the then-president of CDA heard rumors we were running, he advised me to either flip my ticket or run for president on my own. I refused. "I don't want to be the president," I told him, "I feel whoever is the president should want to be the president." He told me that feeling was even more reason for me to run. I realized my fears were highly gendered. My desire to serve was motivated by confidence and a sense of duty, not some poisonous ego. I had the vision, the plans, and the support. My running mate agreed. I would run for president of CDA.

My own experience within College Democrats at the chapter, state, and national level is included in this paper for two reasons: one, it is the inspiration for this thesis, and two, my experience as a woman rising from the chapter (political director to president) to state (political director to vice president) to national level (national council secretary to presidential

¹K. Dolan & T. Lynch, "The impact of gender stereotypes on voting for women candidates by level

and type of office," *Politics & Gender* 12, no. 3 (2016): 573, doi: 10.1017/S1743923X16000246.

candidate) is relevant to my study of how politically engaged college women navigate spaces of organizational elected office. At every step, I was courted, recruited, and supported by people already in power at the level I was attempting to enter. At times, even that was not enough for me to convince myself that I was ready or qualified for the position. I have overcome the gender gap in political ambition, but it took tremendous effort and support from a large network of women throughout the organization. My experience within College Democrats is a direct result of the organizational structures I examine here.

Introduction

Women's underrepresentation in elected leadership matters because when they are present, women make a difference. Women's work ethic is not an utter departure from that of men's elected leadership, but, as Michele Swers highlights, there is evidence to suggest that women are more likely to prioritize policies that address women's issues.² Swers defines "women's issues" as "[seeking] to achieve equality for women; [addressing] women's special needs, such as women's health concerns or child care; or [confronting] issues with which women have traditionally been

concerned in their role as caregivers, such as education or the protection of children."³

Not only do women representatives tend to prioritize women's issues, the association between person and policy is thrust upon them by voters. Several studies "concerning voter attitudes indicate that voters do subscribe to certain gender stereotypes, causing them to favor female candidates on compassion issues such as health care, education, children, and the elderly while viewing male candidates as more capable of handling foreign policy and tax issues."⁴ Women representatives' ability to claim "personal experience or a connection with women as a group" is beneficial to their work in "committee deliberations and in efforts to sell the policy to the public, relevant interests groups, and congressional colleagues."⁵ In discussions of policy, "empathy produced by shared experiences and identification with the interests of a group is central to the representative relationship."⁶

This phenomenon is immediately present in the 2020 presidential election. The pinnacle of American politics had an unprecedented six women declare a candidacy for president in a major political party. Senator Kamala Harris of California consistently addressed black women's maternal death

² M.L. Swers, *The difference women make: The policy impact of women in Congress* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 14; R. Shapiro & H. Mahajan, "Gender differences in policy preferences: A summary of trends from the 1960s to the 1980s," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50 (1986): 42–61; R. Seltzer, J. Newman, & M.V. Leighton, *Sex as a political variable: Women as candidates and voters in American elections*, (Lynne Rienner, 1986); C.K. Chaney, R.M. Alvarez, & J. Nagler, "Explaining the gender gap in the U.S. presidential elections, 1980–1992," *Political Research Quarterly* 51 (1998): 311–40, doi: 10.1177/106591299805100202; K.M. Kaufmann & J.R. Petrocik, "The changing politics of American men: Understanding the source of the gender gap," *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (1999): 864–87.

³ Swers, *The difference women make*, 10.

⁴ Swers, *The difference women make*, 5; V. Sapiro, "When are interests interesting? The problem of political

representation of women," *American Political Science Review* 75 (1981): 701–16; D. Alexander & K.

Anderson, "Gender as a factor in the attribution of leadership traits," *Political Research Quarterly* 46 (1993):

527–45; L. Huddy & N. Terkildsen, "The consequences of gender stereotypes for women candidates at different levels and types of offices,"

Political Research Quarterly 46 (1993): 502–25, doi:

10.1177/106591299304600304; B.C. Burrell, *A woman's place is in the house: Campaigning for congress in the feminist era* (University of Michigan Press, 1994); M.L. McDermott, "Voting cues in low-information elections: Candidate gender as a social information variable in contemporary U.S. elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (1997): 270–83, doi: 10.1177/106591299805100403.

⁵ Swers, *The difference women make*, 10.

⁶ Swers, *The difference women make*, 13.

rates,⁷ her late mother as her biggest inspiration,⁸ and her mother's cancer battle when discussing the need for health care reform.⁹ Elizabeth Warren, senator from Massachusetts, made it a staple of her campaign events to tell little girls "My name is Elizabeth and I'm running for president, because that's what girls do," following up with a pinky promise so they will remember.¹⁰ In the first Democratic debate when Governor of Washington Jay Inslee noted his pro-choice history, Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota interjected, "There's three women up here that have fought pretty hard for a woman's right to choose."¹¹ Senator from New York, Kirsten Gillibrand, denounced Minnesota senator Al Franken's sexual misconduct before any other elected official.¹² Her campaign most embodied an embrace of femininity with power. Ranging from the subtle (using pink in her campaign logo) to overt (consistently being the first person on the debate stage to talk about women's issues) Gillibrand ran an unprecedented and unabashedly feminine presidential campaign.¹³ From local offices to campaigns from president of the U.S., women candidates for office will lean into their womanhood in minute to massive ways.

College Democrats of Oregon. College Democrats of Oregon (CDO) is a state federation under the national organization

CDA. Kevin Frazier from University of Oregon, along with Jordan Kronen and Alex Hatch of Pacific University founded CDO in 2013, later bringing on two women, Anna Carlin of Willamette University and Lekzi Nesmith of Portland State University.¹⁴ These four institutions comprised the original state organization. As of this paper, there are eight campuses are chartered under CDO: Pacific University, University of Portland, Southern Oregon University, Willamette University, Linfield College, Lewis and Clark College, University of Oregon, and Oregon State University. Each campus has an executive board with similar leadership structures to the state board.¹⁵

CDA is the official youth branch of the Democratic Party. It operates at three levels: national, state, and chapter. At the top is the national level, comprised of the Executive Board and National Council. The National Council is part of the Executive Board but is differentiated because it operates most directly and frequently with the states. In the middle are the state federations. As of September 2019, College Democrats has 45 states chartered, plus Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. They are divided into four regions: Northeast,¹⁶

⁷ "Sen. Harris introduces bill aimed at reducing racial disparities in maternal mortality," K.D. Harris: U.S. Senator for California, 22 Aug. 2018, www.harris.senate.gov.

⁸ M. Sedensky, "For Harris, memories of a warrior mother guide her campaign," *U.S. News & World Report*, 11 May 2019.

⁹ K.D. Harris, "Kamala Harris: everyone gets sick and we deserve better," Opinion, *New York Times*, 29 Dec. 2018.

¹⁰ K. Norvell, "'That's what girls do': Elizabeth Warren tells young girls why she's running for president, with a pinky promise," *Des Moines Register*, 9 May 2019.

¹¹ M. Flegenheimer, "There were 3 women onstage, and a man had a lot to say about his work on abortion," *New York Times*, 26 Jun. 2019.

¹² C. Lima, "Full list: Schumer and majority of Democratic senators call for Franken to resign," *Politico*, 6 Dec. 2017.

¹³ L. Lerer, "The Gillibrand test case for women in politics," *New York Times*, 1 Sept. 2019.

¹⁴ At the time of CDO's founding, A.B. used the name "Anna Carlin"; today they identify as trans masculine.

¹⁵ "Constitution," CDO, College Democrats of America. PDF.

¹⁶ Connecticut; Delaware; Maine; Maryland; Massachusetts; New Hampshire; New York; New Jersey; Pennsylvania; Rhode Island; Vermont; Washington, D.C.; West Virginia; Puerto Rico. All states are chartered.

Midwest,¹⁷ West,¹⁸ and South.¹⁹ At the grassroots level are the campus chapters, which fall within the jurisdiction of each state federation.²⁰ They are the lowest level within the CDA organization and operate on college campuses of all types, but primarily public and private four-year institutions.

Each organization, from the national to individual chapters, has its own constitution and individual executive board. CDO's executive board consists of a president, vice president, programs and development director, finance director, communications director, political director, and membership director.²¹ Each state federation and chapter may vary slightly in their titles for their executive board, but broadly follow the same structure as CDO and its chapters.²²

Literature Review

Gender gap in political ambition. Previous literature has only looked at women who have already declared a candidacy, leaving a void in literature about women's nascent political ambition. Bridging this gap, Richard L. Fox and Jennifer L. Lawless lay out three types of ambition:²³ *nascent ambition*, "the inclination to consider a candidacy"; *expressive ambition*, meaning "whether individuals will choose to

enter specific political contests and, once they hold office, whether legislators will exhibit static versus progressive ambition"; and *discrete ambition*, or "whether [an office holder] will choose to retire rather than seek reelection."

Using interviews, their findings support the popular idea that women are less likely to run for office than men. Women respondents to their survey have "a 0.49 predicted probability of having considered a run for office," whereas "an identical man has a 0.62 likelihood."²⁴ This disparity between gender persists to the next step of the candidacy process; men who have considered running have a "0.55 probability of being open to seeking a federal or statewide elective position at some point in the future," but "the 'average' female respondent's likelihood is 0.34."²⁵ This is partly a result of the disparity in self-perceived qualifications. Fox and Lawless' research found that "[57]% of men, compared to only 36% of women, self-assess as 'qualified' or 'very qualified' to run for office," with women "more than twice as likely as men to consider themselves 'not at all qualified' to run for office."²⁶

Women in "states that established an early pattern of electing women to the state legislature, support women's participation in

¹⁷ Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin. All states are chartered.

¹⁸ Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Utah, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington. States not chartered: Colorado, Utah, Nevada.

¹⁹ Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia. All states are chartered.

²⁰ "Constitution—CDA Constitution and Bylaws," College Democrats of America, Democratic National Committee, 3 Feb. 2019. PDF.

²¹ "Constitution," College Democrats of Oregon, College Democrats of America. PDF.

²² "University of Oregon College Democrats Bylaws," University of Oregon College Democrats, College Democrats of Oregon, PDF; "Constitution of the College Democrats at Oregon State University," Oregon State University College Democrats, College

Democrats of Oregon, 2017–2018, PDF; "The Constitution of the Pacific University College Democrats," Pacific University College Democrats, College Democrats of Oregon, 10 Mar. 2014, PDF; "The Constitution of the Willamette College Democrats," Willamette University College Democrats, College Democrats of Oregon, 25 Apr. 2013, PDF; "The Constitution of the Southern Oregon University College Democrats," College Democrats of Oregon, PDF.

²³ R.L. Fox & J.L. Lawless, "To run or not to run for office: Explaining nascent political ambition," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 3 (2005): 644.

²⁴ Fox & Lawless, "To run or not to run for office," 653.

²⁵ Fox & Lawless, "To run or not to run for office," 654.

²⁶ Fox & Lawless, "To run or not to run for office," 654.

public affairs, and do not have a tradition of sex discrimination in income, or gender disparities in educational achievement” are more likely to run for office than women in states without this culture.²⁷ When this culture is absent, women’s participation in elected office is hindered in two major ways. First, women are “significantly less likely than men to receive a political source’s encouragement to run for office,” which reduces the already limited chance of self-starting a campaign; second, women “are significantly less likely than men to deem themselves qualified to run for office, yet more likely to rely on their self-perceived qualifications when considering whether to enter the electoral arena.”²⁸

The ambition gap in college. The gender gap in political ambition starts as early as college, Lawless and Fox’s survey indicates. In a 2012 survey of more than 2,100 college students between the ages of 18 and 25, Lawless and Fox found that “the size of the gender gap in political ambition . . . is comparable to the size of the gap . . . in studies of potential candidates already working in the feeder professions to politics.”²⁹ What makes this disparity particularly concerning is the “respondents were roughly equally likely to have participated in the political activities about which [they were] asked.”³⁰

Self-doubts about qualification follow similar trends, with women “more likely than men to question their qualifications not only in the broadest sense, but also to express less confidence when asked about their politically-relevant skills.”³¹ A hopeful observation in that study is that “members of the College

Democrats or College Republicans were more than four times as likely as non-members to express definite interest in a candidacy,” however “men were approximately two-thirds more likely than women to belong to either [organization].”³² Lawless and Fox’s study on college men and women’s political involvement is one of few available that match the research demographics and question of this study. Literature on women’s political ambition is plentiful for public office, but rather limited specifically for politically engaged college women. This study is aimed to fill that gap.

Another source of disparity comes from women’s lack of encouragement to run for office, both during college years and later in life. Encouragement, on its face, may seem less important in this professional setting compared to qualification, but “66% of women who received any encouragement to run for office reported interest in a future candidacy, compared to 21% who never received encouragement to run.”³³ Encouragement from a parent, friend, or mentor figure is incredibly important to getting women to run for office, as every indicator in the literature shows that women are less likely to independently believe they are cut out for political office than men. Party recruitment especially fills this gap, as institutional support is a strong positive factor in women’s decision to run.

Role models and recruitment. Women in elected leadership have the potential to encourage other women “to view themselves as political actors who can, and should, actively participate in political life.”³⁴ Literature in this

²⁷ Fox & Lawless, “Gender and the decision to run for office,” 270.

²⁸ Fox & Lawless, “Gender and the decision to run for office,” 275.

²⁹ J.L. Lawless & R.L. Fox, “Girls just wanna not run: The gender gap in young Americans’ political ambition,” American University, Washington, D.C.: Women & Politics Institute (2013): ii, PDF.

³⁰ Lawless & Fox, “Girls just wanna not run,” 5.

³¹ Lawless & Fox, “Girls just wanna not run,” 13.

³² Lawless & Fox, “Girls just wanna not run,” 9, 8.

³³ Lawless & Fox, “Girls just wanna not run,” 13.

³⁴ M. Mariani, B.W. Marshall, & A.L. Mathews-Schultz, “See Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, and Sarah Palin run? Party, ideology, and the influence of female role

field is conflicting, however, on the exact efficacy of women role models in elected office. Jeffery Koch's examination of women's political participation in 1992 finds that women role models were a crucial part in encouraging women to participate in the political process, but the same was not significant just two years prior in 1990. Koch postulates that the increased visibility of women's issues in 1992, not the increase in women candidates, was the cause for this shift.³⁵ David Campbell and Christina Wolbrecht found in 1999 that "girls are more likely to envision themselves as politically active when and where they see women run viable campaigns for high-profile political offices."³⁶ Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenny suggest, by contrast, that only as recently as 2014 has the number of women officeholders in the U.S. reached a sort of threshold of where empirical evidence of the role model effect may be present.³⁷

A 2013 survey of women representatives found that "more than half of female legislators 'had not seriously thought about running until someone suggested it.'"³⁸ This is possibly not the worst trend to occur for women's political participation, but when put in the context that "women are significantly less likely to be recruited by political elites than men" a matter of concern is raised.³⁹ Women are recruited less for two

main reasons. The first being that party elites tend to search for candidates with similar personality traits as themselves,⁴⁰ and since women comprise "just under 50% of Democratic party committees and hold only . . . 32% of Democratic party chair positions,"⁴¹ men chairs are more likely to look for other men candidates.

In 2002, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) did introduce in its rules and bylaws that gender equity must be maintained on their national committees. In August 2018, the DNC amended its charter once again to include non-binary members, now requiring that committees "shall be as equally divided as practicable between men and women (determined by gender self-identification) meaning that the variance between men and women in the group cannot exceed one (1)."⁴² This has been immediately implemented at the national party level, while "state Democratic parties will begin implementing the changes to their own committees and organizations in the lead-up to the 2020 convention."⁴³

Though the national party has made significant strides toward substantial and representative gender equity on their committees, this specific effort does not directly apply to the scope of this project. Though CDO is one of many subsidiaries of

models on young women," *Political Research Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (2015): 718.

³⁵ J. Koch, "Women's engagement in politics in the year of the woman," *American Politics Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1997): 116–33, doi: 10.1177/1532673X9702500107.

³⁶ D. Campbell & C. Wolbrecht, "See Jane run: Women politicians as role models for adolescents," *Journal of Politics* 8, no. 2 (2006): 242, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00402.

³⁷ K.L. Fridkin & P.J. Kenny, "How the gender of U.S. senators influences people's understanding and engagement in politics," *Journal of Politics* 76, no. 4 (2014): 1017–37, doi: 10.1017/s0022381614000589.

³⁸ D.M. Butler & J.R. Preece, "Recruitment and perceptions of gender bias in party leader support," *Political Research Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2016): 843, doi: 10.1177/1065912916668412.

³⁹ Butler & Preece, "Recruitment and perceptions of gender bias," 843.

⁴⁰ Butler & Preece, "Recruitment and perceptions of gender bias," 843.

⁴¹ M. Crowder-Meyer, "Gendered recruitment without trying: How local party recruiters affect women's representation," *Politics & Gender* 9 (2013): 397, doi: 10.1017/S1743923X13000391.

⁴² L. Schnall, "Party parity: A defense of the Democratic Party equal division rule," *Journal of Gender, Social Policy & the Law* 13, no. 2 (2005): 382; "The charter and the bylaws of the Democratic Party of the U.S.," *Democratic National Committee*, 25 Aug. 2018, PDF.

⁴³ A. Levy, "Democrats adopt gender nonbinary language to charter," CNN, 25 Aug. 2018.

the DNC, it is not bound by the DNC charter to hold gender-equal boards and a student-led political party (SLPP) at the state level, operating at a drastically different scope of responsibility and power. The DNC rule is important for the broader conversation about adult women's leadership in the national party structure but has a negligible impact on the scope of this study on college women's political comeuppance in a local and statewide SLPP.

Second, recruitment happens through networks, "and political and personal networks tend to be gendered."⁴⁴ Kira Sanbonmatsu posits that there is no discernable impact on women's ability to run for office when parties act as recruiters; however, when parties function as gatekeepers and implement "more restrictive candidate selection processes and gendered social networks," women's chances of being recruited as negatively impacted.⁴⁵

Appointments. Kaitlin Sidorsky's survey of women in appointed governmental positions at the state level is a helpful analogue for the College Democrats of this study since CDO operates with the same breadth as a state government overseeing a variety of municipalities, or college campuses.⁴⁶ Women in appointed positions are not restricted by the same requirements of running for public office. Elected office requires apparatuses of party support and fundraising, braving extensive media exposure, committing to a more-than-full-time job or competing with an existing job,

and a breadth of policy knowledge. Appointed positions do not.⁴⁷ The outlined demands are often deterrents for women to run for office, but if appointed positions do not require the same rigors, then this pathway may be taken more often by women to occupy high office.

Youth political pathways. The scholarship is in general agreement that organizations dedicated to political involvement are a significant pathway to lifelong political engagement. As Daniel A. McFarland and Reuben J. Thomas describe, "politically salient youth organizations entail a variety of activities that develop civic and political skills . . . which in turn heighten the individual's sense of interpersonal competence and self-esteem upon entering new fields of activity."⁴⁸ Hava Rachel Gordon's investigation of two high school organizations in Oakland, California, and Portland, Oregon, support this understanding, adding to the literature how the gendered nature of these environments have the potential to make or break girls' involvement.⁴⁹

Similar to women seeking elected office, development of youth political participation is increased with parental encouragement and role modeling.⁵⁰ Socioeconomic status and parental education level are among the strongest influential factors of a young person's level of political engagement.⁵¹ Gordon expands this relationship, stating, "intersecting dimensions of power such as race, class, and gender are

⁴⁴ Butler & Preece, "Recruitment and perceptions of gender bias in party leader support," 843.

⁴⁵ K. Sanbonmatsu, *Where women run: Gender and party in the American state*, (University of Michigan Press, 2006).

⁴⁶ K. Sidorsky, "Moving on up? The gendered ambitions of state-level appointed officials," *Political Research Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (2015): 802–15.

⁴⁷ Sidorsky, "Moving on up?" 803.

⁴⁸ D.A. McFarland & R.J. Thomas, "Bowling young: How youth voluntary associations influence adult political participation," *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 3 (2006): 403.

⁴⁹ H.R. Gordon, "Gendered paths to teenage political participation: Parental power, civic mobility, and youth activism," *Gender & Society* 22, no. 1 (2008): 31–55.

⁵⁰ J.G. Gimpel, J.C. Lay, & J.E. Schuknecht, *Cultivating democracy: Civic environments and political socialization in America* (Brooking Institution Press, 2003).

⁵¹ S. Verba, K.L. Schlozman, & N. Burns, "Family ties: Understanding the intergenerational transmission of participation," *The social logic of politics: Personal networks as contexts for political behavior* (Temple University Press, 2005).

also cross-cut by ethnic cultural contexts and family type.”⁵² Further research on the long-term effects of initial youth political engagement finds that the parental influences mentioned above in addition to membership in a political organization have positive long-term effects on voter turnout.⁵³

Hypotheses

Since scholarship on women’s motivation for political leadership largely investigates high school students and adults typically over 35, this study of college students is intended to fill that void. Scholarship has thoroughly examined the motivations and barriers to women running for public office. The same has been done for youth pathways to political involvement, but the scope is typically restricted to high school students under 18. This leaves a significant gap in the analysis of collegiate women’s political participation and pathways. College is often the time when people are first exposed to political campaign work, be that volunteering, interning, or paid work. Post-secondary education is a major catalyst in the shaping of women’s self-confidence and leadership skills.⁵⁴ These institutions also house student-led political parties (SLPP) that facilitate this involvement and provide students with the opportunity to not only work for a candidate, but to become one themselves. The structure and duties of an SLPP mimics real world political parties, giving students their first experience at running for office. Student-led political parties are distinct from student government because they function explicitly as a political organization associated with a major party; whereas student government’s responsibilities lie with the

university and are typically restricted from being associated with a political party.

The examination of women’s political ambition looks only at women already at the top, those who have long overcome the barriers that otherwise prevent many other women from achieving the same stature.

As Fox and Lawless themselves have addressed in another work, when scholarship looks only at women who have already made it to the top, understandings of how a woman even begins to overcome the ambition gap is left behind.⁵⁵ In their sole study of college students, they poll only those already at the national level.⁵⁶ College Democrats is uniquely positioned to bolster young people’s political involvement and provide them with pipeline to a national platform, but only a select few ever access it. It is the beginning stages of involvement (the campus chapter and the state federation) that provide women with the skills, resources, and experiences to navigate the upper echelons of these collegiate political organizations. Furthermore, CDO is particularly worthy of investigation because its parent party is much more aware of gendered politics than their counterparts across the aisle, the Oregon Federation of College Republicans.⁵⁷ Liberals identify the pervasive influence of gender in every aspect of life; conservatives lean much more into a model of individualism.

Working with the literature available, four hypotheses are offered:

1. hesitancy to run for office will be present.
2. given that the ambition gap is real, appointment will be an opening for women to hold positions of power.

⁵² Gordon, “Gendered paths to teenage political participation,” 35.

⁵³ E. Plutzer, “Becoming a habitual voter: Inertia, resources, and growth in young adulthood,” *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 1 (2002): 41–56.

⁵⁴ K.J. Boatwright & R.K. Egidio, “Psychological predictors of college women’s leadership aspirations,”

Journal of College Student Development 44, no. 5 (2003), doi: 10.1353/csd.2003.0048.

⁵⁵ Fox & Lawless, “To run or not to run for office.”

⁵⁶ Lawless & Fox, “Girls just wanna not run.”

⁵⁷ See Appendix C.

3. women who are recruited to run, will run.
4. socioeconomic status will be a predictor of involvement.

Hesitancy. Hesitancy to run for office is likely to occur among participants, with women second guessing mounting a campaign before ultimately deciding whether or not to run. As Lawless and Fox have examined, the gender gap in political ambition exists as early as college,⁵⁸ putting women at a distinct disadvantage to pursue leadership positions in student-led political parties (SLPP). How women overcome hesitancy is the most crucial element of this study. Women may doubt their qualification to hold office or unfamiliarity with organizational structures may act as a barrier to participation. Appointments, recruitment, and socioeconomic status, then, present themselves as leading factors that can either help or hinder a woman's ability to surmount her hesitancy.

Appointments. Appointment to positions is a frequent and legitimate pathway for women to hold office. It remains an understudied route to political office despite its prominence in the highest levels of the American government. Unlike the executive branch of the federal government, CDO does not have appointment-specific positions underneath the executive board. In the event of a vacancy, the executive board does go through an appointment process to fill the position.⁵⁹ CDA, on the other hand, does contain up to seven appointed positions under each executive position.⁶⁰ Appointments will be particularly relevant at the state and national level, given the raised stakes of a more competitive political environment off-putting women from self-starting a candidacy and the

need to have connections to those in power at these higher levels to enter those spaces as a leader.

Recruitment. Scholarship cites targeted and personalized asks are more likely to get women to start a candidacy than all-call promotions or recruitment in professional areas where women are a minority.⁶¹ The amorphous nature of CDO at the state level means an individual is unlikely to be familiar enough with the organization's structure to self-start a run for office without first building some sort of connection to people in power. This is compounded by the turnover of state and chapter officers every school year. When leadership changes so frequently, the most reliable method to field candidates is for those in power to directly ask individuals to get involved.

Socioeconomic status. When class is considered, women from a well-off family will have more access to the resources and environments that support candidacies. Additionally, these women will likely have encountered some sort of socialization or training in how to navigate these professional and often men dominated spaces, giving them an edge at fundraisers and networking events where relationship building is crucial to professional growth. Women of lower-class families will have to compensate for their lack of these resources and support systems with higher levels of self-sufficiency and confidence. With little to no external monetary or personal support, these women will often be navigating professional situations for the first time with minimal prior experience and have only themselves to rely on.

⁵⁸ Lawless & Fox, "Girls just wanna not run."

⁵⁹ "CDO Constitution." College Democrats of Oregon, College Democrats of America. PDF.

⁶⁰ "CDA Constitution."

⁶¹ Crowder-Meyer, "How local party recruiters affect women's representation."

Method

I conducted interviews by phone call or video conference with women office holders in College Democrats at the chapter and state level. Because of my immediate familiarity with CDO, approximately half of the participant sample was contacted directly by me; the other half was acquired through the snowball method of asking participants to suggest potential individuals to interview. Men are excluded from the study because the narrow focus on women's motivations and experiences while running for office within a student-led political party. Because the scholarship has already established the existence of a gender gap in political ambition, this study is conducted under that premise and thus investigates how women overcome said gap.⁶²

Scholarship indicates that states with pro-women policies and high numbers of women in government see more women running for office than states with the opposite political environments.⁶³ This hypothesis has been supported in Oregon, making the Beaver State a prime case for my study since Oregon's political environment is rife with women's leadership.⁶⁴ As the *Salem Reporter* touted following the 2018 midterm elections:

A record 37 Oregon women will serve as state legislators in 2019. Come January, once new lawmakers are sworn in, women will hold 28 out of 60 seats in the House. Women also picked up one seat in the Senate, bringing their numbers in that chamber to nine out of 30 . . . Compared to other states, Oregon is

ahead of the curve when it comes to women's representation in government. Women lead the Democratic caucus in the House and both party caucuses in the Senate. Women hold roles of governor, chief justice and attorney general. Val Hoyle, who won a May election for state labor commissioner, will take over from Brad Avakian in January.⁶⁵

Scholarship has already established the link between state political environment and women running for public office. This same concept is being applied to college women in Oregon who are stepping up to run for office at the beginning levels of their collegiate political organizations.

Survey questions were designed to address themes present in scholarship such as ambition, recruitment, ideas of qualification, and how these may be affected by personal demographics.⁶⁶ Interviews were the most reliable method to obtain the fullest story of my participants' experiences. Internet surveys are time consuming and do not allow for follow up questions. Personal interviews, however, do allow for follow up questions that provide a richer understanding of participant answers. Because the nature of this topic is rather personal, I believe that, given my positionality as a fellow College Democrat and the inviting nature of one-on-one interviews, I was able to elicit thorough results that may otherwise not manifest through impersonal methods like online surveys.

⁶² Fox & Lawless, "Gender and the decision to run for office"; Fox & Lawless, "To run or not to run"; Lawless & Fox, "Girls just wanna not run."

⁶³ Fox & Lawless, "Gender and the decision to run for office," 270.

⁶⁴ K. Johnson, "Political year of the woman? Been there, done that, Oregon says," *New York Times*, 2 Sept. 2018.

⁶⁵ C. Withycombe, "Women to hold record number of seats in Oregon legislature," *Salem (OR) Reporter*, 9 Nov. 2018. Several months after the publication of this article, Gov. Kate Brown appointed Republican Bev Clarno to Secretary of State, following the death of Secretary of State Dennis Richardson.

⁶⁶ See Appendix A.

Positionality. It is important to note that with a significant portion of participants I have a professional relationship; I also have personal friendships with many. I served, as noted in the preface, several roles within CDO and its parent organization, CDA. At the chapter level, political director and president; the state political director and vice president; nationally, the national council secretary and presidential candidate. For many of the participants of this study, I was their equal, an ancillary leader, and/or their principal leader. I believe this serves as more of a benefit to my research than a detriment. Having already established professional rapport and personal trust allowed participants to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences in full detail, thus creating a more complete image of a college woman's experience ascending through politics. The conflict of interest is minimal in this study because there are no finances nor employment at stake. College Democrats is an extracurricular activity that is unpaid, with each position being independently elected. Furthermore, the constitution of CDA contains a code of ethics which holds members accountable should they be found to have committed any violation of conduct.⁶⁷

Results

Hesitancy. 38% of participants expressed hesitancy to run for office at some point in their time with CDO. This is comparable to Fox and Lawless' 2005 study where "the 'average' female respondent's likelihood [of being open to seeking a federal or statewide elective position at some point in the future] is 0.34."⁶⁸ Common reasons for not running were conflict aversion, self-perceived lack of

qualification, and unfamiliarity with organizational structure.

Ashley considered running for state board president or vice president but decided against it because she "hadn't been involved on that level yet, I wasn't on CDO and other capacities, so it just didn't really make sense." Once a colleague mentioned he was running for President, "I didn't want to start anything . . . if it was already set in his mind I wasn't going to [also run]." She added, "if I had really wanted it, I should have just run for it, and not worried about his feelings."⁶⁹ Michelle directly cited a "conflict with one of the people on the board" as the reason she did not run for a state position her junior year.⁷⁰ Diana passed up the opportunity to run for vice president of her chapter because she decided she "wasn't necessarily qualified for it, and there was someone else [the man political director] who seemed to want it more." Claire decided to not run for president of her chapter because the current president is eligible for re-election, and "is a nice person. I don't want to take that away from her or cause issues for her."⁷¹ As will be seen with recruitment, social relationships are an influential element to CDO's inner workings. Friendships and social circles may function to benefit the organization by bringing in new membership, but it also works the other way, dissuading women from joining to avoid personal conflict.

Self-assessment of job qualification also shaped participants' decision to not run for office. Alison, who had already been elected to the state board, hesitated to run for president of the state board because she "didn't have a lot of traditional experience like previous presidents," meaning she "never worked on a campaign or worked in a county

⁶⁷ "CDA Constitution."

⁶⁸ Fox & Lawless, "To run or not to run for office," 654.

⁶⁹ Ashley, interviewed and recorded by S. O'Neal, Corvallis, OR, 13 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.6.

⁷⁰ Michelle, interviewed and recorded by S. O'Neal, Aloha, OR, 14 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.6.

⁷¹ Claire, interviewed and recorded by S. O'Neal, Salem, OR, 14 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.6.

office or anything like that.” With the rest of her executive board graduating, she felt that her only qualification was that she was the last one left.⁷² This sense of lacking “traditional experience” often meant that participants felt they did not “know enough” about local politics. Bella claimed she did not have the depth of knowledge required to run for a position on the state board:

I got interested [in politics] later than a lot of people I know through College Dems, so I felt like I didn’t have all the knowledge and awareness of basic facts about politics that maybe others did. I feel like I worked pretty hard to be aware of what’s going on and engage others and educate others, but I still don’t always feel like I’m the most knowledgeable or educated on those topics.⁷³

Similarly, Diana felt unqualified because she “didn’t have as much depth of knowledge about the political process, what exactly was happening in the state legislature and at the national level, [and] as much expertise on the nitty gritty of policy and representatives.”⁷⁴

Despite serving in CDO for over two years, this sense of being unqualified never left Diana. She explained,

All throughout my time in College Dems and other positions I ran for I always felt like I wasn’t informed enough about political issues. I was very passionate about the issues that the Democratic Party stood for, but I never felt that I was as up to date

as some of my peers on election specifics and what ballot measures were happening. I felt like just having a general interest in the issues wasn’t enough when I didn’t have the same level of knowledge about the specifics as my peers.

A learning curve does exist within each position at the state and chapter levels, but it is not as steep as Alison, Bella, and Diana presumed before running. Information on races, candidates, and ballot measures are readily available through many online resources to learn on-the-job, but the internalized gendered pressure to completely fulfill job requirements, perceived for real, can dissuade women from even considering applying. This is where uplifting actions like recruitment, as will be discussed later, become especially powerful.

Unfamiliarity with the organization’s structure and professional expectations also influences participants’ self-perceived qualification to run. As Jessica neatly put it, “from an outsider’s perspective, a lot of things in politics seem more important than they truly are.”⁷⁵ Chelsea, who worked with Melissa to form her chapter, “felt qualified to hold a chapter position because I helped found the chapter [and] there were not any expectations of what that looked like.”⁷⁶ But when she ran for a state position, Chelsea did not feel qualified because she “didn’t know what the expectations were.” Melissa cited similar reasons.

I did not feel qualified because I didn’t have an infrastructure of

⁷² Alison, interviewed and recorded by S. O’Neal, Paris, France, 14 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.6.

⁷³ Bella, interviewed and recorded by S. O’Neal, Portland, OR, 14 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.6.

⁷⁴ Diana, interviewed and recorded by S. O’Neal, Charlotte, NC, 17 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.6.

⁷⁵ Jessica, interviewed and recorded by S. O’Neal, San Francisco, CA, 10 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.5.

⁷⁶ Chelsea, interviewed and recorded by S. O’Neal, McMinnville, OR, 14 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.5.

support . . . I didn't know who to communicate with and who to talk to. The lack of information, the lack of infrastructure. We communicated very clearly with [the DNC staffers in charge], and they never once mentioned that there was an exec board for Oregon College Democrats or even that there are other chapters in the state. I felt very unqualified in the sense that I didn't know how to lead us forward and I didn't know how to get us started or what we should be doing.⁷⁷

Not knowing the requirements of the position and/or how to navigate university systems were also cited by three other participants.⁷⁸ Unfamiliarity is a strong enough factor to make participants give pause at the idea of running, but not enough to stop them. Claire exhibited particular assurance over her concerns of knowledge and qualification, "I thought of that thing where men only need to meet 70% of qualifications to apply and women feel the need to meet 100% of things to apply for it, and I felt I shouldn't let that stop me. The worst thing they can say is no."⁷⁹

Appointments. 24% of participants entered positions in the chapter, state, or national level through an appointment. At the chapter level, appointment is a useful tool when starting a new chapter.⁸⁰ Without a membership established to hold proper elections, appointments are used to build the executive board. Appointment to the state board acts as a helpful route to involvement at a higher level, especially when a woman is less likely to self-

start a candidacy.⁸¹ At the national level, Kayla was appointed to what is typically an elected position in CDA, and Alyssa entered the national scene initially via appointment to appointment-specific positions before ultimately being elected to the national board. Alyssa, along with Danielle and Diana, were all introduced to office in CDO via appointment. Just as Sidorsky posits, the demands of running for office can act as strong deterrents for women, but appointed positions can seem more approachable. Appointed office then became a convenient outlet to introduce these women to office.

Recruitment. Every participant of this study has either recruited or been recruited by someone they knew. Personal relationships were often the source of recruitment practices. A surprising trend that arose throughout the interviews was the consistent use of the term "informality." Three alumnae, across several questions, reiterated the informality of the recruitment and encouragement process.⁸² This included both their own experiences and their outreach efforts. When asked if anyone unaffiliated with College Democrats encouraged her to run, Vanessa said, "I don't know if there was any sort of formal, telling me to run. I guess it informally would come up in conversation with my job or other extracurriculars I was involved in."⁸³ She used the same language again in a later question about chapter and state federation initiatives to increase women's membership and office holding. A state board she served on held only one man and five women. "We hadn't even thought about it," Vanessa said, "It just

⁷⁷ Melissa, interviewed and recorded by S. O'Neal, McMinnville, OR, 14 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.5.

⁷⁸ Molly, interviewed and recorded by S. O'Neal, Eugene, OR, 10 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.6; Vanessa, interviewed and recorded by S. O'Neal, Davis, CA, 14 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 3.6; Diana, 3.6.

⁷⁹ Claire, 3.6.

⁸⁰ Claire, 2.4; Heather, interviewed and recorded by S. O'Neal, Salem, OR, 14 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 2.4.

⁸¹ Diana, 3.6.

⁸² Questions 3.3, 5.1, 6.1.

⁸³ Vanessa, 3.3.

informally happened. [Getting women involved was] not necessarily a formal process that was put into place, but I think that was just in the back of our minds and we didn't realize it."⁸⁴ Regarding her own recruitment efforts, Vanessa noted she had, but "maybe not formally, but definitely informally, encouraging [women] to run for certain positions."⁸⁵

Diana shared the same sentiments to the initiatives question—"I think it is sort of a more informal mentorship approach."⁸⁶ Emphasizing the long history of women's leadership in the state federation and the camaraderie among them, getting women involved is "not a sort of explicit initiative to bring women in the organization." Diana does note, though, that once a woman enters office, the rest of the women on the board "[focus] on building up those female friendships, and then through the example of the women leaders that we've had in the president position, specifically, but other positions too, has just served as a way to encourage other women to step into those positions as well."⁸⁷

Kayla had the most extensive explanation for the recruitment process:

A lot of it was informal in the way that we did encourage women to keep running, and that all of us had internal backwards plans on the folks that we were mentoring for leadership positions. We basically held one other accountable for checking in with those folks and making sure that they had positive experiences with College Dems on their chapter and then were also engaged in the statewide level. On a personal basis, [we] would check in with those folks to make sure they were getting everything that they needed and were having an overall good experience with being

Figure 1. Breakdown of participants' self-identified socioeconomic status.

involved. We did keep one another updated on those—the goal was to make sure that we always had a slate of folks ready to run because what had happened in the past, given that it was such a new organization, is that people just wouldn't run for office and then we would have no executive board. We identified really strong leaders on campus and made it a goal to have a diverse slate of folks joining us, and they also happened to be a really incredible group of women.

The process, as described, reads like it is part of a strong infrastructure. Yet Kayla immediately followed with,

The simple answer is we did not do anything that was necessarily a

⁸⁴ Vanessa, 5.1.

⁸⁵ Vanessa, 6.1.

⁸⁶ Diana, 5.1.

⁸⁷ Diana, 5.1.

Figure 2. Of the participants comprising each socioeconomic class, no upper middle-class participants are first generation college students, while nearly half of low-income participants are first generation.

formal way of encouraging women to run, but we did have some sort of informal metrics that we kept in place so that we continued to mentor those women that were already involved in the chapter level.⁸⁸

The independent yet consistent use of “informal” to describe the recruitment process is a curious trend. I believe it reflects the action’s relative effortlessness. Butler and Preece found that party elites tend to search for candidates with similar personality traits as themselves.⁸⁹ And since “party elites” in CDO are mostly women, and there is an abundant presence of women members across chapters, women are grooming other women to succeed them instead of men grooming other men—

the opposite of the problem posed by Crowder-Meyer.⁹⁰

Socioeconomic status. Verba, Schlozman and Burns, Gordon, and McFarland and Thomas all stressed that socioeconomic status (SES) and parental education level are some of the most influential factors for a young person’s political engagement.⁹¹ Wolak and McDevitt’s 2011 study found that “parental resources in the form of income [and education] matter for both genders, but the size of the effects [on political knowledge] are greater for young women than for young men.”⁹² Results from this study’s participants follow these findings almost exactly.⁹³

Figure 1 shows the class breakdown of participants. 42.9% of participants came from an upper middle-class family. Participants with

⁸⁸ Kayla, interviewed and recorded by S. O’Neal, Portland, OR, 12 Oct. 2019, Google Forum transcript, 5.1.

⁸⁹ Butler & Preece, “Recruitment and perceptions of gender bias in party leader support,” 843.

⁹⁰ Crowder-Meyer, “How local party recruiters affect women’s representation,” 397.

⁹¹ Verba, Schlozman, & Burns, “Family ties”; Gordon, “Gendered paths to teenage political participation,” 35;

McFarland & Thomas, “How youth voluntary associations influence adult political participation,” 402, 409.

⁹² J. Wolak & M. McDevitt, “The roots of the gender gap in political knowledge in adolescence,” *Political Behavior* 33, no. 3 (2011): 518.

⁹³ See Appendix B for full demographic breakdown.

high SES all have at least one parent with a college degree, ranging from a bachelors to a masters to a JD or PhD. Figure 2 examines this class stratification further, showing a downward trend between SES and parental degree holding occurs from middle class to lower middle class to low income. 19% of participants came from middle class families, with the vast majority of them having at least one parent with a degree. As Verba, Schlozman and Burns, Gordon, and McFarland and Thomas would predict, students from lower economic classes and who are first-generation college students are a minority in the participant pool, comprising 33% of interview participants.

When asked if she felt qualified while running for office, Alyssa succinctly answered, “Oh hell no.” As predicted, women with lower SES had to be more reliant on themselves to build their own networks and professional skills. Alyssa’s experience exemplifies the disadvantages women of low-income families face and the extreme efforts that must be taken to overcome them:

I had a really tough time realizing that even though I might not have the tactics or strategy, [I had the] passion of wanting to go into [office]. That all came about out of frustration. Nobody else is going to do it, so I’m going to throw my hat in and try and do it. Nobody else is doing it right, so there has to be somebody who’s actually going to go in there, try some mistakes and then just turn around and fix those mistakes that you learn. That’s what my whole goal was. Nobody else is representing what I feel needs to be represented, so what I’m going to do is throw my hat in the ring. If I get it, I get it, and we’ll see how this turns about. But nobody really in the

Democratic Party taught me or groomed me for anything.⁹⁴

Discussion

For students and adults alike, Oregon is a promising place for women’s political leadership. At the top levels of the state, Democratic women rule, and this is reflected in Oregon’s student-led political party, College Democrats. Though placed in a relatively welcoming political environment, women leaders in CDO are still forced to navigate barriers to running for and holding office. This study serves as a reminder that though progress in women’s leadership is present, it is far from complete.

Women do not take their positions of power lightly. Each participant expressed a deep sense of duty to not only uphold the responsibilities of their position, but to also open the door for other women to get involved. At the chapter level to the state to even the national, women who come through CDO are on the lookout for other women. The state organization operates in an amorphous sphere, spread out among several campuses with no central location or contact. CDO survives this through the relationship established between the state board and their chapters. This relationship is where communication occurs, mentorship is built, and information is exchanged about the happenings of the organization. Where CDO survives, CDA fails.

From the founding of CDO, CDA has ignored Oregon. This can be attributed to the idea that “Oregon just does not have the perception of a power player” on the national scene as a west coast liberal state.⁹⁵ Since 2013, each national administration has not invested resources in Oregon or built a lasting professional relationship with Oregon’s board. At the same time, CDO has repeatedly proven itself a valuable source of leadership. Kevin

⁹⁴ Alyssa, 3.6.

⁹⁵ Frazier, “College Democrats Interview.”

Frazier served as chief of staff to the president of CDA soon after founding the CDO. Two formidable women in CDO have served as programs director at the national level, one through appointment and the other by election. In my tenure as national council secretary, I was the sole elected member from the western region and used my position to reconnect Oregon to the national scene with moderate success. When running for CDA president, I, unfortunately, still bore that token status. The current national board does not have an elected member from the West. Since its founding, Oregon has been a “bootstrap organization” bringing in anyone with “the energy and the excitement” to get things done.⁹⁶ CDA, on the other hand, is a “body that recognizes and empowers self-starters.”⁹⁷ This not only harms CDO’s growth and women’s upward mobility, but also the national organization writ large by depriving them of valuable leadership in elected and appointed positions.

The state Democratic Party of Oregon (DPO) also fails to embrace CDO leaders in a long-term manner. CDO and the DPO are wholly disparate political bodies. CDO receives no funds from the state Democratic party, holds no leadership positions on state committees—voting or non-voting—and frequently can only attend state party events in exchange for volunteer services at the event in question. There are some sympathetic figures, thankfully, like Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum and several local politicians, respective to CDO chapters, who make a point to engage College Democrats with their incumbent and/or election activities through volunteer and employment opportunities. On the whole, though, a professional relationship between CDO and the DPO lacks any real structure or strength to benefit young women leaders seeking to cross the bridge between college organizing and state organizing. This is

not to say that a woman leader in CDO cannot become ingratiated with the DPO; two participants’ experiences speak to quite the opposite. Instead, there is not a reliable bond established between the student-led political party and state party to sustain a sort of professional funneling of talent.

Beyond self-starting a candidacy, appointments are a legitimate pathway to officeholding. Appointments offer the opportunity to get involved in executive action without the demands of running for office. This opens doors for women who may want to get involved but are too hesitant to lead a campaign and gives people in power the opportunity to directly engage women they see fit for leadership who may not see it themselves. Appointments also act as a proactive tool to build chapters and a reactive measure to fill unoccupied positions. Where elections may be too time consuming or fail to produce a full field of candidates, appointments present themselves as a fast-tracked solution. This a helpful pathway to bring in women who may be interested in being involved at a higher level but otherwise would not self-start a candidacy. Though it serves as a helpful outlet to bring women into positions of power, it is highly situational and cannot be relied on as a constant tool available to get women involved.

A steadfast network of women makes it possible for a women-majority board to be held at every chapter and even the state executive board for several consecutive years. The recruitment of women by women—whether formal or informal—has created a direct lineage of power from the founding CDO in 2013 to now. This network is largely comprised of friends, colleague, associates, and classmates. Knowing another woman in CDO—especially one already in power—greatly increases a woman’s chances of running

⁹⁶ K. Frazier.

⁹⁷ K. Frazier.

for an organizational position or being appointed to one.

Parental class and education status can be pre-determining factors for which women even make it onto College Democrats' radar. If a woman comes from a wealthier and more educated family, she is more likely to be in an environment where College Democrats can recruit her into power. If a woman comes from a less wealthy and less educated family, she is less likely to be privy to the networks, connections, and opportunities available that would bring her into College Democrats.

Because CDO holds a similar executive board structure as other federations in CDA, this study should be easily replicable across the 47 state federations. Should this study be replicated in other states chartered in College Democrats with pro-women policies and high women's representation in office, I anticipate it would yield similar results to mine due to strong correlation between a state's political environment and College Democrats' gender makeup in Oregon. Conversely, if this study were replicated in states with the opposite environments, we could possibly expect rather different outcomes due to the low number of women in public positions of political power.

This study would benefit from the inclusion of Oregon Federation of College Republicans. The Republican Party nationwide has a drastically different reputation with women than the Democratic Party, and its reputation in Oregon is also distinct. Given Republicans' minority status in the Oregon state legislature—and the lack of infrastructure the College Republican National Committee holds in Oregon—I would expect even more rich and interesting findings from the organization across the aisle.

Conclusion

The founder of CDO noted Oregon politics has “an expectation that leadership boards

need to look like the state.”⁹⁸ With state leaders like Governor Kate Brown and Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, women in Oregon are in a political environment ripe for the taking. Alumnae of CDO have gone on to study law, work as campaign managers, office staffers, pollsters, United Nations lawyers, start their own political consulting firm, and run for state office themselves. CDO, be it at the chapter, state or national level, in many ways mirrors the obstacles women face—both external and internal—when considering a run for political office. It has also provided its women members the skills, connections, and opportunities to personally and professionally grow into political leaders.

It is imperative to recognize that these patterns of hesitancy, appointment, recruitment, and socioeconomic status begin much earlier in a woman's life and potential political career. These student-led political parties are microcosms of “real government,” introducing young women to empowerment and disempowerment at a much earlier age than is discussed in the scholarship. At its best, an SLPP can introduce young women to powerful and encouraging networks of other women who can help shape her professional experience and personal confidence. At its worse, an SLPP can lack the people and resources needed to encourage a woman to run and support her candidacy and tenure, which may set a disappointing precedent that turns young women away from running for public office. And as a woman climbs from the local to state to national level of an SLPP, these best and worst cases often come hand in hand.

There is also evidence of a direct thread between college women's leadership in student-led political parties and the history-making presidential candidacies of senators

⁹⁸ K. Frazier, “College Democrats Interview.”

Harris, Warren, Klobuchar, and Gillibrand.⁹⁹ As noted in the beginnings of this study, the “six-woman wave of candidates came after four years of buildup—years that featured Democratic women getting mad, getting organized, getting on the ballot and getting elected in record numbers in 2018.”¹⁰⁰ All four made uplifting women the backbone of their candidacies, effectively nationalizing the elements of recruitment this study found crucial to women’s involvement in SLPPs. Appointments to political office have also hallmarked the early careers of Harris, Warren, and Gillibrand. Harris was appointed to the Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board, California Medical Assistance Commission, and San Francisco Assistant District Attorney.¹⁰¹ Warren was appointed chair of the Congressional Oversight Panel for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) and the first-ever Strategic Adviser of the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee.¹⁰² Gillibrand was appointed to the U.S. Senate after Hillary Clinton’s confirmation as Secretary of State.¹⁰³

The senators’ own familial backgrounds point to similar trends in this study, where women from families of a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to get ahead than families of a lower socioeconomic status. Harris’s father was Stanford professor

and her mother a breast cancer researcher; Gillibrand’s father was a well-known lobbyist and grandmother founded the Albany Democratic Women’s Club.¹⁰⁴ Klobuchar’s mother was a second grade teacher and her father an author; Warren grew up in a single income family with her father working in sales until suffering a heart attack, forcing Warren’s mother to seek employment for the first time working phones for Sears.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, their collegiate backgrounds emulate the backgrounds of this study’s participants. Harris graduated from Howard University, was involved with debate, the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, and was elected freshman class representative of the liberal arts student council.¹⁰⁶ Warren received a debate scholarship to attend George Washington University, and dropped out after two years at the age of 19 and got married. Later she graduated from University of Houston, supporting herself on a waitressing salary.¹⁰⁷ Klobuchar graduated from Yale University and interned for then-Vice President Walter Mondale.¹⁰⁸ Gillibrand graduated from Dartmouth College, joining the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority, and

⁹⁹ T. Gabbard and M. Williamson are not included in the ranks of Harris, Warren, Klobuchar, and Gillibrand as they consistently polled low and did not garner the same level of national attention from major news outlets and feminist media during their campaigns compared to the senators.

¹⁰⁰ D. Kurtzleben, “Did gender keep democratic women from winning the presidential primary?,” NPR, 17 Apr. 2020.

¹⁰¹ D. Morain, “Two more brown associates get well-paid posts,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Nov. 1994; “DA names new head of career crime unit,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 Feb. 1998.

¹⁰² J. Kantor, “Behind consumer agency idea, a tireless advocate,” *New York Times*, 24 Mar. 2010; A. Terkel & R. Grim, “Elizabeth Warren gets senate democratic leadership spot,” *Huff Post*, 13 Nov. 2014.

¹⁰³ M. Esch, “Gillibrand re-elected to Senate in New York,” *AP News*, 6 Nov. 2018.

¹⁰⁴ D. Owens, “Meet Kamala Harris, the second black woman elected to the U.S. Senate,” *NBC News*, 8 Nov. 2016; K. Tumulty, “Kirsten Gillibrand,” *Time*, 23 Jan. 2009.

¹⁰⁵ L. DePaulo, “The audacity of Minnesota: Senator Klobuchar,” *Elle*, 30 Mar. 2010; W. Weissert, “Warren’s origin story, her mother and THE dress, comes home,” *AP News*, 20 Dec. 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Owens, “Meet Kamala Harris,” *NBC News*.

¹⁰⁷ A. Hess, “Elizabeth Warren went to college for \$50 a semester, but the chances I got don’t exist anymore,” *CNBC*, 30 Jul. 2019.

¹⁰⁸ M. Kaji & B. Gehlen, “Klobuchar: Everything you need to know about the 2020 presidential candidate,” *ABC News*, 2 Mar. 2020.

interning for Senator Alfonse D'Amato.¹⁰⁹ Though none of these senators have a history of direct involvement with College Democrats as undergraduates, their participation in similar organizations like debate, sororities, and internships provided networks and professional development adjacent to what CDO does presently.

Though a May 2019 Gallup poll showed 94% of Americans said they would vote for a woman, sexist inquisitions dominated the narrative around the women senators' presidential campaigns.¹¹⁰ Harris, Warren, Klobuchar, and Gillibrand had never lost an election prior to their respective presidential bids, yet questions of electability, likeability, and if "America is ready for a woman president" ran rampant among journalistic coverage of their campaigns.¹¹¹ Voters did raise valid concerns during the 2020 cycle; as NPR neatly summarizes,

Harris' record as a prosecutor angered some progressives. Klobuchar was too moderate for some progressives, and she also faced allegations that she was abusive to her staff. Gillibrand has swung from moderate positions to

progressive ones during her career. Warren's early answers on how she would pay for 'Medicare for All' struck some as evasive.¹¹²

Despite grounds for honest questioning of candidate viability, sexist voter behavior and media coverage irreparably harmed their bids for president.

The ambitions and obstacles of Harris, Warren, Klobuchar, and Gillibrand's campaigns are ultra-magnified versions of those introduced to college women in student-led political parties. SLPPs provide an introductory environment for college women to navigate party and electoral politics and their connection to running for public office is an element worthy of further study.

The women of CDO have shaped the organization to be a unique space of women's empowerment, inspiring the women around them to run for office here and now. With early exposure to running for office in a strictly partisan and political organization, CDO is helping prepare young women for the fulfilling and tumultuous world of public office. Emboldened by each other, young women in CDO are not only the future of the Democratic Party but powerhouses of its present.

¹⁰⁹ "Gillibrand Says d'Amato isn't in the picture," *New York Times*, 9 Feb. 2009; W. Shapiro, "Who's wearing the pantsuit now?," *Elle*, 8 Jul. 2009; A. Perret, "Gillibrand '88 picked for N.Y. Senate seat," *The Dartmouth*, 23 Jan. 2009.

¹¹⁰ J. McCarthy, "Less than half in U.S. would vote for a socialist for president," *Gallup*, 9 May 2019.

¹¹¹ Kurtzleben, "Did gender keep democratic women from winning the presidential primary?," NPR.

¹¹² Kurtzleben, "Did gender keep democratic women from winning the presidential primary?," NPR.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Questions have been grouped based off themes that have occurred in the scholarship.

1. Basic demographic questions.

1. What school do you attend?
2. What year in school are you?
 - i. For alumnae only: What year did you graduate?
3. What are you receiving your degree in?
4. What is your race/ethnicity?
5. With what sexual orientation do you identify?
6. How would you describe your socioeconomic status?
7. Are you a first-generation college student?
8. If no, what degrees do your parents hold?
9. What is your home state?
10. How old were you when you decided to label yourself a Democrat?
11. What inspired you to identify with the Democratic party?

2. Professional history with CDO.

1. What are your previous positions with CDO?
2. What are your current positions with CDO?¹¹³
3. When did you first get involved with CDO?
4. How did you first get involved with CDO?
5. What is the current gender makeup of your chapter/state federation executive board?

3. Personal history with CDO.

1. Were you approached to run for a position before you realized you wanted said position? If yes, by who? If no, what motivated you to run?
2. Did you seek power brokers or mentors to aid your decision to run? If yes, who? If no, why not?
3. Did any outside organization or people unaffiliated with CDO encourage you to run? If yes, who?
4. Were you discouraged from running by anyone? If so, whom?
5. Prior to your campaign, did you feel qualified to hold the position you sought to occupy? Why or why not?
6. Have you considered running for a position within your chapter/state federation and ultimately decided against it? If so, what motivated you to not run for that position?

4. Perception of gender parity.¹¹⁴

1. Is your chapter/state federation structured in a way that allows for women to ascend to an office beyond your campus?
 - i. For alumnae only: Since graduating, are you pursuing an advanced degree and/or working? Where and what degree/job title?

¹¹³ Participants that have graduated from college are not asked this question.

¹¹⁴ Fox & Lawless, "Gender and the decision to run for office."

2. Do you feel your gender has potentially had a hindering effect on your journey through CDO?
 3. Do you feel your gender has potentially had a beneficial effect on your journey through CDO?
- 5. Gender parity programs.**
1. What initiatives have your chapter/state federation done to increase women's membership and office holding?
 2. Are you aware of any gender parity rules in CDO?
- 6. Personal recruitment.**
1. Have you recruited any women into your chapter, state federation and/or the national organization?
- 7. Overall thoughts.**
1. Catchall thoughts I may have missed in my questions?

Appendix B: Participant Demographics

Variable	Percentage of Participants					
School	<i>Public</i>	<i>Private</i>				
	54.5*	45.4				
Membership Status	<i>Freshman</i>	<i>Sophomore</i>	<i>Junior</i>	<i>Senior</i>	<i>Alum</i>	
	4.8	9.5	14.3	28.6	42.9	
First Generation	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>				
	19.0	81.0				
Race	<i>White</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>East Asian</i>	<i>Latina</i>		
	81.0	4.8	4.8	9.5		
SES	<i>Upper Middle Class</i>	<i>Middle Class</i>	<i>Low Middle Class</i>	<i>Low Income</i>		
	42.9	19.0	14.3	19.0		
Sexual Orientation	<i>Heterosexual</i>	<i>Bisexual</i>	<i>Lesbian</i>	<i>Questioning</i>	<i>N/A</i>	
	47.6	28.6	4.8	4.8	14.3	
Home State	<i>Oregon</i>	<i>California</i>	<i>Ohio</i>	<i>Montana</i>	<i>Colorado</i>	<i>Washington</i>
	61.9	19.0	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.8
Age of Party ID	<i>12 and younger</i>	<i>13 to 17</i>	<i>18 and older</i>	<i>"Always"</i>		
	38.1	28.6	23.8	9.5		

*One participant transferred between two public universities and left school before receiving a degree. All other participants have not transferred schools and have either received a degree or are on track to.

Appendix C: Positions held by participants in College Democrats

Appendix D: College Republicans – Error 404

I initially set out to include women office holders in the Oregon Federation of College Republicans. I relied on Republican participants to be suggested by Democratic interviewees. Due to the College Republican National Committee lacking the same kind of infrastructure CDA has in Oregon (they only have three chapters compared to CDO's seven), I was unable to acquire more than a few names. I used the snowball method to reach prospective participants from the organization, which yielded three prospective participants. My intention was to reach as close to parity as possible between the parties, but, after acquiring only three contacts, it became clear that parity was not possible and the imbalance of participants between parties was too severe

to continue with an interparty analysis. One individual provided an interview, one did not respond to my inquiry, and one, once it was ultimately clear that I would not be able to accrue the same number of College Republicans as College Democrats, was not contacted. Consequently, the results of my study focus only on the structure and experiences of women office holders in CDO.