Gender Quotas and Political Ambition: Evidence from Germany

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Abstract: The low number of women represented in the U.S. Congress and in other American legislatures is often attributed to a dearth of political ambition among American women. While many European legislatures have a considerably higher percentage of women in their parliaments, whether this is due to a higher level of political ambition among European women has not been established. Instead comparativists usually attribute the high numbers of women in legislatures to institutional factors such as gender quotas. This paper combines these two literatures to investigate how gender quotas and political ambition interact in one country in which they are utilized – Germany. I draw upon an original survey of over 1000 rank and file members of German political parties and find that a gendered gap in political ambition persists there, despite the use of gender quotas. Instead, quotas seem to work by drafting politically un-ambitious women into elective office. This fact may limit the effectiveness of gender quotas in moving women beyond the back benches of parliament and it may also be contributing to a backlash against gender quotas.

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Gender Quotas and Political Ambition: Evidence from Germany

Students of American politics have extensively studied political ambition among U.S. citizens beginning with Joseph Schlesigner (1966). He expected that a certain proportion of the population in any given democracy would harbor the desire to become a politician, and once elected these politicians would likely desire to be reelected to their position or to subsequently be elected to an even higher political office. Scholars working in this tradition have consistently found American women to be less politically ambitious than American men; this ambition gap in turn translates into a dearth of women in elective offices in the United States. The most recent scholarship in this area finds women less likely than similarly-placed men to consider a run for elective office, to think themselves qualified to run for office, to actually run, or to be willing to run for office if asked (Lawless and Fox, 2005). Furthermore, women who do serve in the U.S. Congress are less willing than men to remain there over time (Lawless and Theriault 2006; Thomas, Herrick, and Braunstein, 2002, 414).

Outside the Anglo-Saxon context, however, political ambition has rarely been studied. Norris and Lovenduski’s (1993) work on women in the UK in the early 1990s suggested that a dearth of female candidates played a role in women’s underrepresentation in Westminster, but other than this article, there is no systematic research about political ambition among female or male citizens of long-term democracies. A notable exception in the developing world is Kenworthy and Malami, 1999. There is only one systematic study of men and women that addresses gender and political ambition in the German case. In 1985 Hoecker studied party members in the state of Bremen and briefly examined their interest in running.

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1 For a review of this literature see Davidson-Schmich 2006a.
2 Indeed, qualified women’s opting out of top positions in corporate America have also made headlines in the past several years. See Belkin (2003), Kellerman and Rhode (2004), Tischler (2004).
3 A notable exception in the developing world is Kenworthy and Malami, 1999. There is only one systematic study of men and women that addresses gender and political ambition in the German case. In 1985 Hoecker studied party members in the state of Bremen and briefly examined their interest in running.
interested in women’s political representation have focused on institutional and cultural (rather than individual-level) explanations for the presence or absence of women in elective office. Of institutional factors, gender quotas have been found to have a strong causal impact on the number of women elected to parliament (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Indeed, four years after the aforementioned Norris and Lovenduski study, the number of women in the British Parliament doubled with the Labour party’s adoption of all-women’s short lists for open seats in this election (Norris and Lovenduski 2001).

Similarly, while Germany and the United States had similar percentages of female legislators in their national legislatures before German parties adopted gender quotas in the 1990s, the percentage of women in the German Bundestag is now more than twice that in the U.S. Congress.

Because comparativists have not studied political ambition to date, it is not clear what the relationship between gender, political ambition, and gender quotas is, however. Do quotas lead to an increased number of female candidates because they close the ambition gap between men and women? Alternatively, do gendered gaps in political ambition remain, with quotas simply forcing party leaders to search far and wide until they can find politically ambitious women to put on the ballot? Or do quotas increase the number of women running for elective office by drafting politically unambitious women into elective office?

This paper represents a first contribution to our understanding of gender and political ambition outside the Anglo-Saxon context. I study gender and political ambition
in Germany because German parties have adopted a range of voluntary gender quotas for the selection of candidates and these quotas are inconsistently enforced, providing varied political opportunity structures in which German women consider political careers. Based on a survey of the German candidate pool, I find mixed evidence of a gendered gap in political ambition in Germany. Gender quotas there do not appear to increase the number of women in elective office by closing the political ambition gap between men and women.

I develop these conclusions in the following manner. First I describe my survey. Second, I theoretically elaborate the relationship between gender quotas and political ambition. Third, I discuss the survey’s findings on gender and political ambition in Germany and, fourth, discuss the determinants of political ambition in Germany. I conclude by elaborating on the ramifications of my findings.

**The Survey**

In the United States, most Congressional candidates are drawn from the ranks of attorneys, businesspeople, and educators; candidates are chosen by voters in primaries rather than directly selected by political parties. Political recruitment in Germany follows a very different path. Active members of political parties control candidate nominations for both halves of Germany’s dual ballot – single member district seats and party lists. As a result, parliamentarians are almost exclusively active party members who have held inner-party office or, for legislatures beyond the local level, lower-level elective office. Some additional candidates are drawn from the ranks of voluntary groups affiliated with political parties (Kaltefleiter 1976, von Beyme 1986, Patzelt 1995, Saalfeld 1997).
Hence the candidate pool in Germany is composed of the rank and file members of German political parties. Examining the membership of the major German parties provides a first hint that a political ambition gap may indeed be present in Germany, as all of the major parties contain fewer men than women. The Greens’ membership is 37% female, the Social Democrats’ (SPD) 29%, the Christian Democratic Union’s (CDU) 25% and the liberal Free Democratic Party’s (FDP) membership is only 23% female (McKay 2004). Fewer German women than men seem to be interested in taking the first step toward a political career – joining a political party.

However, not every person who joins a political party is interested in running for elective office or actually does so. Many male party members may have low levels of political ambition. Ideally, to determine whether there is a gendered political ambition gap in Germany I would have taken a random sample of all rank and file party members from all major parties in Germany and assessed their levels of ambition. Due to Germany’s strict privacy laws, however, obtaining contact information for all parties’ members throughout the Federal Republic was an impossible task. Instead, what is publicly available are the names of party members elected to the leadership of the parties’ precinct-level organizations. Hence, the survey sample consists of the highest-ranking male and highest-ranking female officer in precinct-level organizations from the largest political parties in western Germany; respondents were drawn from randomly selected

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4 Because some candidates are drawn from beyond party ranks, one could argue that interest groups may also constitute part of the German candidate pool. However, for the purposes of conducting a survey, it is not possible to systematically identify which positions in which interest groups regularly serve as a reservoir of candidates and thus not possible to comprehensively distribute surveys. Furthermore, since parties are such an important recruitment channel it is unlikely that individuals harboring political ambition would avoid joining a party and simply pursue interest group leadership positions.

5 The precise percentage for the Christian Social Union is not available but it is likely lower than that in the CDU.
locations throughout five representative western German states. These precinct-level groups are the lowest organizational level of each party; often they contain only a handful of members. Thus their members are as close to the rank and file of the party as is feasible to identify.

The five parties whose members are surveyed include the libertarian Free Democratic Party (FPD), the center-right Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union\(^6\) (CDU/CSU), the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Greens. The Greens pioneered the use of gender quotas in Germany in the 1980s, requiring at least 50% of electoral list places to go to women, with the top slot reserved for a female candidate. As increasing numbers of their female voters began defecting to the Greens, the Social Democrats quickly adopted a gender quota too. They now require both men and women to have no less than 40% and no more than 60% of the slots on their electoral lists. In contrast, in keeping with their libertarian ideology, the Free Democrats have not adopted a quota for women’s representation on their electoral lists. The socially conservative CSU has also not done so either. In between these extremes, the CDU has a 33% “women’s quorum” for its electoral lists. This quorum was imposed by party leaders in the late 1990s over the opposition of many rank and file members. Party statutes allow the quorum to be circumvented if, after a concerted search, not enough qualified female candidates are found. This variance in quotas allows me to investigate the effects of parties’ quotas on the political ambition of their members.

\(^6\) In 15 of the 16 German states the largest party on the right of the political spectrum is called the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). In Bavaria the CDU does not exist and is replaced by a separate, more socially conservative and pro-welfare state party organization, called the Christian Social Union (CSU). At the federal and European levels the two parties cooperate and form a joint parliamentary caucus. The survey did not include members of the Left Party, as this new party did not have an extensive inner-party organization in these five states at the time the survey was conducted.
It is important to note that these quotas also apply to inner-party offices. This means that in the precinct-level party organizations surveyed, the Greens require male and female co-chairs, the Social Democrats require that at least one of the top two officers is a woman, and the Christian Democrats require one of the top three posts to go to a woman, if one can be found after a concentrated search. The Christian Social Union and Free Democratic Party have no such requirements so any women who occupy leadership positions so that any women found in their leadership ranks have not been offered the position simply to fill a quota.

German gender quotas are voluntary promises made by political parties, however, and there are no legal sanctions for non-compliance. Quota implementation varies across the German states (Davidson-Schmich 2006b) and the five states surveyed represent a range of political opportunity structures for female candidates. The northern city-states of Hamburg and Bremen are among the states where quotas are most consistently implemented, while the large southern Länders of Baden-Württemberg and Bayern have the lowest rates of quota implementation. Centrally-located Northrhine Westphalia has a mixed record. Because Hamburg and Bremen are so small, the universe of local party organizations was surveyed in these states. In the larger states, a sample of localities was randomly selected from each region of the state.

After a pretest had extremely skewed response rates along gender lines (90% of women but only 30% of men responded), care was taken not to portray the survey as one measuring gender and political ambition but rather as a survey of political ambition in

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7 The exceptions were the Social Democratic and Christian Democratic party organizations in Hamburg. These parties were so large that only a sample of branch organizations was taken.
general. Of the respondents to the final questionnaire, 49.2% were women and 50.3% were men. The survey contained three parts: one about the respondents’ communities and party organizations, one about their personal political experiences, and one about their demographic characteristics. Relevant questions will be described in more detail below.

Surveys were sent to a total of 1068 party members across the five states in the fall of 2006 and 40 surveys were returned by the postal service by the end of the year for various reasons (incorrect address, recipient had moved or died). 465 surveys were received by the end of the year, for a response rate of 45.2%. The response rates from the northern city-states (41.1% for Hamburg and 41.8% for Bremen) were lower than those for the more rural southern states (43.5% for Bavaria, 49.5% for Baden-Wuerttemberg, and 50.2% for Northrhein-Westphalia). Respondents came from small towns under 20,000 (26%), large cities over 500,000 (40.6%), and medium-sized locales (33.3%). Large cities were overrepresented because two of the states sampled are city states with over 500,000 inhabitants in each city. While equal numbers of questionnaires were sent to members of the four major parties, partisan response rates differed considerably. Social Democrats are overrepresented, making up 32.5% of the respondents, members of the CDU/CSU and the Greens were 23.4% of the respondents respectively, but only 19.6% of returned questionnaires were received from Free Democrats.

Below I discuss my findings from the survey but first I take a theoretical look at the relationship between gender quotas and political ambition.
Gender Quotas and Political Ambition in Theory

The gendered gap in political ambition found in the United States is usually attributed to one of two broad causes: to the gendered political opportunity structure there or to differences in gender socialization. Each of these causes suggests different possibilities about the interaction between gender quotas and political ambition.

If political ambition is driven by the political opportunity structure, we would expect to see fewer differences between the sexes in Germany than we do in the United States because the German political opportunity structure is more conducive to women’s political representation. As Schlesinger argued, “ambition for office, like other ambitions, develops with a specific situation, that it is a response to the possibilities which lie before a person” (1966, 8); he concluded “in the United States the opportunities to advance have been best for white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males” (1966, 172). Indeed, comparative research finds the use of plurality electoral systems like that in the United States to have a negative effect of women’s representation (Darcy, Welch, Clark, 1987, p.118; Rule 1994); incumbency is a huge advantage to getting elected in a first past the post system and U.S. incumbents are predominantly male. Further, multi-party systems – especially ones containing Green or New Left parties – have been associated with higher percentages of women in elective office than two party systems like that in the United States (Caul 1999, Matland and Studlar 1996).

There are a number of other aspects of the political opportunity structure in the United States that have also been found to depress women’s political ambition. Women in the candidate pool are less likely to be encouraged to run for office than their male
counterparts (Bledsoe and Herring 1990; Fox and Lawless, 2004). Furthermore, the American women who are encouraged to run tend to get asked to run by family, while men are more likely to be asked by colleagues – arguably a stronger signal of potential success (NWPC 1994). Political party leaders are often reported to discourage potential women candidates (Fox, 2000, 245-6) or at least be subconsciously biased against them (Niven 1998). As a result, the American parties approach fewer women to run than men (Carroll 1985, 44) and strong party organizations in the United States are associated with lower numbers of female candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2006). But comparative research shows that when parties are weak, women are unlikely to run for office (Caul 1999) as individual ambition matters even more because candidates are largely self-selecting and, as we will see below, women are unlikely to feel qualified to run.

The political opportunity structure in Germany is much more conducive to women’s candidacies. The German electoral system relies heavily on proportional representation, there is a multi-party system with an influential Green party, gender quotas are in place for many parties, and candidates are chosen by parties not voters. As a result, women are often approached by their parties about running for office – even in parties that do not have quotas. (See Table 1). 91.1% of the women surveyed, but only 87.8% of the men, reported that someone had encouraged them to run for office. Of these respondents, 84% of the women but only 79% of the men had been encouraged to run for office by their political party. In all parties but the quota-less CSU, equal or greater percentages of women than men had been asked by their parties to run for office, although the difference was only significant at conventional levels in the Green party –

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8 The difference of these means was not significant at conventional levels.
9 Differences of means test significance level p < .1.
the party with the highest quota for women. These differences may work to reduce any gender differences in political ambition in Germany or possibly shape political ambition along partisan lines.

On the other hand, there are a number of factors in American women’s personal lives that depress their political ambition. These factors are also present in Germany and would predict a gendered political ambition gap akin to that in the United States. This gap should be present regardless of an individual’s party context.

Because women are primarily responsible for childrearing and household tasks it is difficult for them to take on the long and irregular hours associated with a political career – especially if the office held requires the politician to spend considerable time in the state or national capital. Repeated studies have found American women with children at home to have lower levels of political ambition than other groups, especially when an office far from home is considered (Lee, 1977, 128-130; Flammang, 1997, 162-67; Mandel 1983, 86; Fox and Lawless, 2003; Fulton et al 2006). Some observers have noted that women are less single-minded about pursuing a political career because they also get satisfaction from their role in the family (Bledsoe and Herring, 1990, 218). American women have also been found to be more likely than American men to leave political office if it clashes with their family responsibilities (Thomas, Herrick, and Braunstein, 2002, 414).

The German women surveyed were significantly more likely than their male counterparts to be responsible for child care was well as for cooking, cleaning, laundry and shopping (See Tables 2a and 2b), suggesting that the same barriers to women’s
finding a political career attractive exist across the Atlantic as well. This is likely the reason why fewer women than men are found among the members of German political parties. Membership in such a party requires more than simply checking a box on a voter registration for as in the United States; instead members pay relatively high membership dues and are expected to participate in routine party meetings and activities.

Even if they do not have children, however, American women tend to focus more on the effects of a political career on their interpersonal relationships than their male counterparts. Women in the United States have been found to consider more factors than men do when weighing an elective office (Flammang, 1997, 160; Fox, Lawless, and Feeley 2001). Having a supportive spouse has been shown to be of vital importance for American women considering a run for office while men often ignore their spouse’s opposition (Carroll 1993, 201; Mandel 1983, 73). A study of potential candidates done by the National Women’s Political Caucus found men more likely than women to say that running for office might hurt their personal lives, but nonetheless more men than women were willing to run (1994).

In the German sample, men were significantly more likely than women to be married or in a long-term relationship – 89% of male respondents were married compared to 81% of females – suggesting that women with partners are at least less likely to take an active role in German political parties. The female survey respondents who were married, however, were significantly more likely than male respondents to believe that their spouse would support them running for office; on a scale from 0-3 (spouse completely opposed to me running for office – spouse completely supportive of me running for office), female respondents ranked their spouse a 2.4 while male respondents gave their
spouse only a 2.1. As in the American case, spousal support appears critical for married German women interested in political activity.

American women feel less qualified to hold elective office than equally qualified American men (NWPC 1994, Lawless and Fox 2005). This is especially detrimental to American women’s political ambition because women are more likely than men to believe that qualifications are an important factor in determining whether one should run for office (Fox and Lawless, 2004; Fox, Lawless, and Feeley 2001). American women also fear sex discrimination if they were to run for office (Lee, 1977, 132), they feel they have less of a chance of successfully raising funds than men (Fox, 2000, 238-9), and are more likely than men to believe that women have a tough time getting elected and are less likely than men to think that they could win (NPWC 1994). Empirical research has repeatedly found that American women are not handicapped in either fundraising or winning elections, however, suggesting that women’s concerns are misplaced (Darcy, Welsh, and Clark, 1987; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton, 1997; Duerst-Lahti, 1998, 15).

German women also doubt their own qualifications for office: on a scale of 0-3 (completely unqualified to completely qualified), male survey respondents averaged 1.88 while females averaged 1.81. Moreover, German women from all parties were also significantly more likely than their male counterparts to believe a man would have an

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10 Differences of means test significance level p < .001.
11 Because there is a very high level of public funding for campaigns in Germany access to money plays very little role in German politics. Only 13% of the sample mentioned the cost of campaigning as a detriment to running for office; there were no significant gender differences in responses and this variable had no impact in multivariate analysis of the determinants of ambition.
12 Differences of means test significance level only p < .25, however. Further there were no statistically significant gender differences in the weight respondents gave to the importance of qualifications as a prerequisite for running for elective office.
easier chance of either obtaining their party’s nomination for a direct seat\textsuperscript{13} in their
electoral district or winning that seat in that election. See Table 3. Thus if gendered
socialization is the cause of low levels of political ambition among women, we would
expect to observe the same gendered political ambition gap in Germany that we find in
the United States. This gap should exist in all German parties.

**Gender and Political Ambition in Germany**

The contrasting determinants of political ambition described above are reflected
in the survey results. Whether we observe a gendered gap in political ambition in
Germany depends upon how ambition is measured. There are three main ways in which
political ambition has been measured in the extant literature. First, some scholars have
investigated individuals’ actual behavior (whether a respondent actually ran for political
office or not). Second, other researchers have studied respondents’ attitudes toward
running for office in a hypothetical situation under which they are offered a ballot
nomination by their party. Finally, others have examined those individuals who have
actually been elected to public office and studied their behavior once in office. Did they
run for reelection (or plan to run for reelection), did they progress to a higher office (or
do they hope to), or did they decide not to run for reelection (or plan not to)? In the U.S.
case, the first two of these measures generally uncover a consistent gendered gap in
political ambition revealing American women to be less politically ambitious than
American men (Diamond 1977, Bernstein 1986, Constantini 1990, NWPC 1994, Fox and
Lawless 2004, 2005; Lawless and Fox 2005). U.S. studies of progressive ambition have

\textsuperscript{13} Germany uses a mixed electoral system for federal elections and in some state elections; some MPs are
directly elected and others enter parliament through an electoral list. This question referred specifically to
the directly elected seats.
had mixed findings, with some authors finding a gendered political ambition gap while others do not (Carroll 1985, Gerzog 2002, Bledsoe and Herring 1990, Flammang 1997, Lawless and Theriault 2006, Thomas, Herrick and Braunstein 2002).

All three measures of ambition were included in my survey of German politicians. Depending on which measure of ambition is used, however, the survey found different relationships between gender and political ambition in Germany. Below I discuss the first two of these measures – the third is discussed in the Appendix.

**Political Ambition in Practice**

In the five states in which the survey was conducted, there are a total of eight possible elective offices for which ambitious candidates can campaign. Five of these offices occur at the local, or sub-state level. The lowest level local elective office in all German states is the town or city council (called Gemeinderat or Stadtrat depending on the size of the community). In Bavaria and Nordrhein-Westfalen, local mayors (Bürgermeister) are directly elected as well. Outside of the city states Hamburg and Bremen, states are divided into counties and there are county councils for which ambitious politicians can campaign (Kreistag). In Bavaria the county mayor (Landrat) is directly elected. Bavaria also has an additional level of government between the county and the state called the district and politicians can be elected to the district council (Bezirkstag).

In addition there are three higher political offices for which Germans can run; I refer to these as “global” offices. Every German state has a state parliament (usually called the Landtag); German politicians can also be elected to the federal parliament (Bundestag), and finally, they can run for the European Parliament as well.
At both the local and the global levels, survey respondents were asked whether they had never thought of running for elective office at that level, had considered running for one of the offices but not actually done so, pursued their party’s nomination but not received it, received their party’s nomination but not been elected, or had been elected to any of these bodies. When the percentages of men and women surveyed who had at least pursued their party’s nomination for a local or global office, received the nomination, or been elected, was compared to the percentage of respondents who had not pursued a nomination or even considered it, no significant gender differences were found: 77% of men and 78% of women surveyed had at least attempted a run for local office whereas the percentages were 27% and 31%, respectively, for higher office. Here I do not discriminate whether candidates received the nomination or were elected, as ambition simply refers to a person’s desire for elective office. Even the most ambitious individuals may be denied their party’s nomination or lose an election. When the results are disaggregated by party, there were no conventionally significant gender differences in propensity to run for office on the Green, Christian Democratic Union, or Free Democratic tickets. However, women within the CSU and SPD were significantly more likely to have run for office than the men in the party. See Table 4.

Political Ambition in Theory

A second way to measure political ambition is to ask respondents to imagine that their party would offer them the nomination for a certain position and then to ask them how they would react. In contrast to the above measure, this method does uncover a gendered ambition gap in Germany akin to that in the United States. (See Table 5.) Both at the local and at the “global” level, German women are significantly less likely than their
male counterparts to be willing, at least in theory, to accept their party’s nomination to run for elective office. The further away from a respondent’s home the proposed office moved, the greater the ambition gap. Women appeared particularly reluctant to run for the Bundestag located in Berlin; while 27% of men surveyed said they would accept an offer to run for the federal parliament, only 16% of women said they would. Men were also significantly more likely than women say they ran for office because “I always wanted to be a politician”; 9% of male but only 2% of female respondents gave this reason for running for office.14

Some interesting partisan differences emerge with regard to respondents’ willingness to accept a hypothetical offer to run for office. In parties without quotas – the CSU and FDP – women on average are equally or even more ambitious than their male colleagues. In contrast, in parties with quotas, on average, women expressed lower levels of political ambition than their male colleagues, although this difference was statistically significant only in terms of Christian Democrats.

Because most members of German political parties, and most survey respondents, do not ever attempt to run for office beyond their locality, the previous measure of political ambition, the one that taps into actual behavior running for office, does not capture this gendered difference in ambition at the global level where few men or women ever attempt to run for office.

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14 Difference of means test, significance level p < .001.
German men and women’s differing interest in office beyond the local level can also be seen in answers to a question that asked respondents whether, in their precinct-level party group, women were more or less willing than men to run for elective office, or whether it depended on the circumstances. Over half of the respondents (52.1%) said women were less willing to run, 32.8% disagreed and said this was not the case, and an additional 15.1% of respondents said it depended on the office in question. Of the latter group, 82.7% said that while women in their party organization were equally as likely as men to undertake a run for local or county office, females were less willing to run for state, federal, or European office. There were no significant gender differences in the answers to these questions.

Thus the use of gender quotas in Germany has narrowed or eliminated the gap between men and women who actually run for office, but they do not appear to have closed the gap between the genders in terms of individuals’ interest in pursuing a political career, especially beyond the local level. The following section performs multivariate analysis to determine the cause of the gendered gap found using this theoretical measure of ambition.

**Explaining the Gender Gap in Political Ambition**

Using the 0-2 scale of theoretical ambition described above as a dependent variable, I perform ordered logit regression to determine the causes of German party members’ political ambition. Independent variables fall into three categories: those related to the political opportunity structure, those related to an individual’s private life, and those describing personal motivations.
Independent Variables: Political Opportunity Structure

As described above, German parties make a range of promises about what percentage of their candidates for elective office are women; the variable *partyquota* is the percentage of female candidates a respondent’s party has promised to run. Parties with no quotas are coded as 0%. I also asked respondents their subjective perception of whether their local party organization actually adhered to its quota or not; the dummy variable *enforcement* measures this perception. If respondents believed their party always tried to meet or exceed its quota, the score was a 1; for respondents who reported inconsistent enforcement or whose party had no quota the score was a 0. I expect higher, more consistently enforced gender quotas to be associated with higher political ambition for two reasons. First, women (who often doubt their own qualifications or chances of success) receive an extra signal from their party that they are likely to succeed in a quest for their party’s nomination. But second, if a party’s branch organization enforces gender quotas it is also likely to enforce other formal procedures for selecting candidates. This makes it easier for all members, male or female, to figure out how the nomination process works and assess their chances of winning their party’s nomination. I also include a dummy variable called *yesparty* which measures whether or not a respondent had been asked to run for office by their political party; I expect those who had been recruited by their party will be more politically ambitious.

The literature on political ambition in the United States has also shown that the more likely a person is to win a race, the more likely s/he is to want to run in it. Several variables tap into this dimension of the political opportunity structure. The variable *nowin* is a dummy variable coded 1 if a respondent gave the fact that s/he believed s/he was
unlikely to win an election as a reason for not having run for office or not wanting to run in the future; all others were coded 0. The variable *incumbent* is a dummy variable coded 1 if a respondent indicated someone from his/her party held the directly elected seat(s) from the district. While the presence of an incumbent may deter an individual from running for the party’s nomination for a directly elected seat, it is expected to increase his/her interest in running on the party’s list because incumbency here is also a proxy for the party’s strength in the district.

I also include variables measuring demographic characteristics of the district in which a respondent resides. *Catholic* is a dummy variable corresponding to what the respondent identifies as the dominant religion in his/her precinct. Comparative research has shown that Catholicism is associated with lower levels of women in elective office (Davidson-Schmich 2006b; Norris 2004, Paxton 1997, Rule 1994). *Population* measures the size of the area in which the respondent lives. I expect people from small towns to be more ambitious than their cohorts in large cities because at least at the substate level there are roughly equal numbers of elective offices available but rural party organizations are much smaller than urban ones, meaning that small town respondents face less inner-party competition for any given nomination. For example, the large city of Stuttgart has one city council seat per 10,000 inhabitants. In the same state, the small town of Biberach has one city council seat per 1,000 residents.
Independent Variables: Family Circumstances

The survey included a number of measures of respondents’ personal lives which may influence their political ambition. The dummy variable *married* measures whether a respondent was married or in a domestic partnership. Because women are primarily responsible for childcare, I expect the presence of minor children in the home to depress their political ambition, while children are less likely have this effect on men. Hence I include the interactive variables *menkids* and *womenkids*. I also include a dummy called *childcare* which is coded 1 for respondents who indicated they were the sole primary caregiver for minor children; respondents who shared childcare, whose spouse was primarily responsible, or who had no children were coded zero. The variable *chores* is a measure of the role played by the respondent in cooking, cleaning, shopping, and doing laundry. For each task respondents received two points if they reported primary responsibility for this task in their household, one point if they shared the task with a partner, relative, or paid helper, and no points if their partner assumed primary responsibility for this task. Finally, I asked respondents whether they had turned down a chance to run for office or would turn down a chance to run for office because it would take time away from their family. This is measured by a dummy variable called *timefamily*.

Independent Variables: Motivations for Running (or Considering a Run)

In addition to questions about their personal circumstances, respondents were asked questions about what had motivated them to run for office, or what would motivate them
to run for office. I also asked for their assessments of their own qualifications to run for
office. Respondents were given a list of reasons why someone might have run or consider
running for office and asked if this reason applied to them. Those selecting reasons
having to do with a desire for political power or achieving substantive political goals are
hypothesized to be more politically ambitious than other respondents.\(^\text{15}\) These
motivations are captured in a series of dummy variables. Those giving a positive response
to the following statements were given a 1, otherwise they were coded as 0: “I want(ed)
to bring about change.” “I wanted to promote specific policy goals”, and I always wanted
to be a politician (“ambition”).

Respondents were also asked about reasons they would not (or had not) run for
office. One of the most common responses given was that it would harm someone’s
career if they did so. Hence I include a dummy variable for this measure, hypothesizing
that those who fear running for office will hurt them professionally will harbor low levels
of political ambition.

In keeping with the literature on women and political ambition in the United
States which finds women less likely to run than men because they see themselves as less
qualified to do so, I include a measure of a respondent’s subjective qualifications for
office.\(^\text{16}\) This variable is coded 0-3 and taps into a scale of not qualified – very qualified.
I also include a dummy variable representing people’s responses to the question of
whether they were a feminist or not, given that research on the American case has found

\(^{15}\) Other choices respondents could select from included more passive choices such as, “it happened by
accident”, “a mentor encouraged me”, or “my party asked me to run.”

\(^{16}\) The survey also included a measure asking respondents to rank the importance of various qualifications
as a prerequisite for running for public office. This variable did not prove significant in multivariate
analysis nor did improve the overall performance of the models used.
feminists more politically ambitious than other women.

Control Variables

I control for the age of the respondent, as research in the American case shows that age is negatively correlated with political ambition. I also include a dummy for sex in case the above variables capture an additional difference between the sexes. The variable income measures personal income which is expected to be negatively correlated with ambition. I also include a dummy variable for tenured civil servants because these Germans are guaranteed a job at the same rank they previously held, should they leave their position in the public service to run for office and eventually lose. Finally, I also include a control variable for respondents from the Christian Social Union. Respondents from this regional party (which is only found in the state of Bavaria) are particularly unlikely to desire office at the federal or European levels and are thus expected to be less ambitious than members of other parties with a more national scope.

Results

The results of the regression are depicted in Table 6. Gender quotas have a clear effect on political ambition: higher gender quotas are strongly associated with lower levels of political ambition. The higher the quota, the more of a depressing effect it has on male and female political ambition. As conventional theories of political ambition would expect, as gender quotas limit ballot spots available to men, men become less ambitious. That women holding leadership positions in parties with higher quotas are less ambitious than those in parties with lower or no quotas indicates that quotas do not work to close the political ambition gap between men and women. Instead, party leaders are now giving
leadership positions to women who are not politically ambitious in order to fill gender quotas. In contrast, women in leadership positions in parties without quotas appear to have gained their positions because they are conventionally ambitious.

As expected, gender quotas that are enforced are associated with higher levels of ambition both among men and women. Also as expected, residence in large cities depresses political ambition as potential candidates face many more rivals for their party’s nomination than do party members in small towns. Other aspects of the political opportunity structure performed less well in the analysis. The belief that one had little chance of winning an election reduced ambition levels whereas electoral success by a respondent’s party increased ambition, but the significance levels here were low (p=.10 and .16 respectively). Catholicism and being asked to run by the party had no significant impact on ambition.

Respondents’ family circumstances were not as significant as expected by some literature on gender and political ambition. Being married, primarily responsible for childcare, or other household chores had no significant impact on a respondent’s political ambition. Surprisingly, neither did having minor children for women’s political ambition. Men became significantly more ambitious when they had children. The fear that running for office would take time away from their family was only weakly significant in dampening respondents’ political ambition. Perhaps this result is an artifact of the sample under consideration. The people surveyed here had already found a way to combine their household responsibilities with leadership in a precinct level party organization, a commitment associated with considerable volunteer work at odd hours. Running for or holding elective office may not seem to be much different to such individuals.
Of those who are active in their parties, significant predictors of ambition included considering oneself a feminist and feeling qualified to run for office. Because German women are significantly less likely to feel qualified than similarly placed men, they appear to be less ambitious. The fear that running for or holding elective office would be detrimental to a person’s political career had a significant negative impact on ambition. Always wanting to be a politician, a desire to affect change or achieve policy goals all had a significant positive impact on respondents’ level of political ambition.

As expected, the control variables age, tenured civil servant status, and membership in the Christian Social Union all had significant influence on ambition. Income, however, did not, reflecting the low monetary cost of running for office in Germany. Once all the above variables were controlled for, sex had no independent effect on political ambition.

Conclusions

A less pronounced gender gap in political ambition exists in Germany than in the United States. Gender quotas have pulled many German women into elective office and if ambition is measured in terms of actually having run for a party’s ballot nomination or for elective office, no significant gender differences emerge in the German candidate pool. In some political parties, women are actually more likely to have run for office than their male counterparts. Roughly three quarters of men and women who are active in major parties’ precinct level organizations have run for sub-state office. Both men and women are relatively unlikely to have ever undertaken a run for the state, federal, or European parliaments. When ambition is measured in terms of individuals’ willingness to accept their party’s hypothetical nomination to run for office, however, a gender gap
emerges. At both the local and “global” levels, female party leaders are significantly less likely than their male counterparts to express a desire to run for office. The gap is more pronounced at the “global” than the local level and it exists in all four of the major German parties.\(^{17}\)

Gender quotas have a significant impact on political ambition: the higher the quota, the less ambitious both male and female party members are. Male ambition is reduced because a clear signal is sent that men’s candidacies are not wanted for particular seats. Rather than increasing women’s ambition, however, quotas seem to force parties to recruit unambitious women to occupy the leadership and electoral slots reserved for them. Because women are more likely to doubt their own qualifications, to desire to be a politician or to achieve specific policy goals – all factors associated with increased political ambition – they are less ambitious than German men, despite the presence of gender quotas. Women are also a minority of members in German political parties – likely because of their family circumstances.

These facts mean that gender quotas have succeed in bringing more women into elective office in Germany not by raising women’s political ambition or interest, but by forcing parties to recruit unambitious women to run for elective office (and to hold inner-party leadership positions) while limiting opportunities for more politically ambitious men. This finding has two implications. First, these conditions may foster a backlash against gender quotas or give party organizations an excuse not to enforce quotas. Second, while gender quotas may be bringing women into the backbenches of parliament,

\(^{17}\) Women in the CSU were on average more ambitious than their male colleagues but the difference was not statistically significant. On average both male and female members of the regionally-based CSU had significantly lower levels of ambition than their counterparts in the nationally-based parties.
they may not be bringing in ambitious women interested in rising through the ranks to positions of leadership within parliaments or into the executive branch.
Works Cited


Appendix: Progressive Political Ambition

Another way to measure political ambition is to assess what people do once they hold elective office. Schlesinger (1966) expected politicians to harbor what he called “progressive ambition,” desiring either reelection to their current post or election to a higher office. The only bodies to which large numbers of survey respondents had actually been elected were local councils, county councils, and state legislatures. At the local level, men had served significantly longer terms than women (5.5 years compared to 3.9 years) whereas the reverse was true at the state level where female MPs had served an average of 8.8 years compared to 4.9 years for male MPs. At the county level there was no statistically significant difference in the length of term served. No significant gender differences emerged when all officeholders were asked about their future plans (see Table A1). Relatively equal percentages of men and women planned on running for a higher office as opposed to running for the same office again or deciding not to run again. Further research will discuss this finding in more detail.

Table A1: Gender and Progressive Political Ambition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are you planning to do in the future?</th>
<th>Men (N = 127)</th>
<th>Women (N = 135)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Run for higher office</td>
<td>18.10%</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run for same office</td>
<td>58.30%</td>
<td>54.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won’t run again</td>
<td>29.10%</td>
<td>28.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: % of Respondents Who had been Asked by their Party to Run

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall*</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens*</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Difference of means test, significance level p < .1

Table 2a: Who is responsible for the care of any children under the age of 18?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My spouse/partner</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another family member or nanny</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse/partner and I share</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>childcare equally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference of means test, significance level p < .0005

Table 2b:
Percentage of respondents saying they are primarily responsible for household activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooking**</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning*</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry**</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping**</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference of means test, significant level p < .0010 (*) or p < .0005(**)

Table 3: Who is more likely to obtain the party’s nomination for a direct seat from the respondent’s electoral district or to win that seat in an election?

Win the Nomination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Man</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and Women have an equal chance</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Woman</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference of means test, significance level p < .0005

Win the Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Man</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and Women have an equal chance</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Woman</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference of means test, significance level p < .0005
Table 4: Political Ambition in Practice

Average score on a scale of 0 never attempted to run for office, 1 attempted to run for office at the local or global level, or 2 attempted to run for office at the local and global level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD**</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU*</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSU**</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Difference of means test, significance level p < .025  *Difference of means test, significance level p < .1

Table 5: Political Ambition in Theory

% of respondents willing to accept their party’s nomination to run for an elective office
(Range 0-2; 1 point given for willingness to accept nomination at local or global level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall **</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU**</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Difference of means test, significance level p < .025
| Variable          | Coefficient  | Std. Error  | z Score | P > |z| |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------|---------|-----|---|
| **Opportunity Structure** |              |             |         |     |   |
| Partyquota       | -.0455361    | .0093104    | -4.89   | .000 *** | |
| Enforcement      | .5326512     | .2839805    | 1.88    | .061 *    | |
| Yesparty         | .1156548     | .3292716    | 0.35    | .725     | |
| Nowin            | -.6830249    | .4216932    | -1.62   | .105     | |
| Incumbent        | .4151625     | .3016493    | 1.38    | .169     | |
| Catholic         | -.2695227    | .3198997    | -0.84   | .399     | |
| Population       | -.1933396    | .0627453    | -3.08   | .002 *** | |
| **Family Circumstances** |              |             |         |     |   |
| Married           | -.3458741    | .4105682    | -0.84   | .400     | |
| Menkids           | 1.02972      | .3754266    | 2.74    | .006 *** | |
| Womenkids         | -.2209306    | .4586349    | -0.48   | .630     | |
| Childcare         | -.5651731    | .5625211    | -1.00   | .315     | |
| Chores            | .0640607     | .1318847    | 0.49    | .627     | |
| Timefamily        | -.3508378    | .2667535    | -1.32   | .188     | |
| **Motivations for Running** |              |             |         |     |   |
| Change            | .7678079     | .3595018    | 2.14    | .033 ** | |
| Ambition          | .975262      | .5812684    | 1.68    | .093 *    | |
| Policy            | .520895      | .265291     | 1.96    | .050 ** | |
| Professional      | -.6734598    | .3070295    | -2.19   | .028 ** | |
| Qualifications    | .7122597     | .2087195    | 3.41    | .001 *** | |
| Feminist          | .7851375     | .3774801    | 2.08    | .038 ** | |
| **Control Variables** |              |             |         |     |   |
| Age               | -.0351749    | .0134722    | -2.61   | .009 *** | |
| Sex               | -.4793406    | .3788382    | -1.27   | .206     | |
| Income            | -.1064533    | .0832283    | -1.28   | .201     | |
| Civil Servant     | -.7423183    | .3462432    | -2.14   | .032 ** | |
| CSU               | -.790942     | .701119     | -3.98   | .000 *** | |

Log Likelihood: -245.58863  Pseudo $R^2$: 0.1757  N = 300  *** p < .01, ** p < .05, * p < .1