

Job Talk: Candidate Sex and Presentation of Prior Experience in Televised Ads¹

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Abstract

Why do some candidates advertise their pre-office experience to voters while others do not? We ask whether the sex of the candidate makes a difference. Women often gain more qualifications than men before running for office. Female candidates have incentives to message those qualifications to voters to compensate for gendered expectations of prior experience. For evidence, we analyze the contents of 1044 televised advertisements from 2018 state legislative candidates from the Wesleyan Media Project. We find that women are no more likely than men to highlight their professional backgrounds in TV ads. However, we find that male candidates are significantly more likely to highlight prior political experience. The relationship is moderated by incumbency status, such that male challengers advertise their political experience more than female challengers. The results raise fresh questions about gender differences in campaign communication and voters' expectations of male and female candidates.

In her minute-long 2018 campaign advertisement for Michigan Senate District 24, Democratic candidate Kelly Rossman-McKinney tells a story of a single mother who viewed refundable glass soda bottles as “a solution to a problem.” She goes on to tell how, with the money collected from those bottles, that woman was able to buy her son diapers and that those bottles got that single mother through some hard times. Rossman-McKinney lets the viewer know that she (yes, *that* single mother) started a successful small business that grew to be a “powerhouse” public relations firm. More specifically, she conveyed that her experience and ability to work hard and overcome adversity was emblematic of the Michigan Spirit. Rossman-McKinney was ultimately unsuccessful in the election, losing to Republican Tom Barrett by ten points.² Yet, her ad stands out for vividly framing her experience, rising above the challenges of single motherhood to become a successful entrepreneur, as evidence of her qualifications for office.

Most candidates make biographical details available to voters on the campaign trail, whether through media interviews, campaign websites, or in-person interactions with voters. However, many decline to emphasize their prior experience—in elected office or in the working world—in paid campaign ads. The economic reasoning is straightforward: paid advertisements, especially on TV, are costly and provide limited space for content (30-60 seconds). Candidates may prefer to telegraph other messages like issue positions, valence statements, or endorsements over experience. That choice would be consistent with survey experiments on voter evaluations of candidate experience, which often shows that voters place little weight on prior officeholding (Hansen and Treul 2021) or job titles (Carnes and Lupu 2016; Sadin 2016; though see

² Livengood, Chad. “Kelly Rossman-McKinney Dead at 67.” *Crain’s Detroit Business*. November 9, 2021. Accessed 4/4/22 at <https://www.crainsdetroit.com/obituaries/kelly-rossman-mckinney-dead-67>.

McDermott 2005). Nonetheless, many candidates mention their prior experience in their ads, sometimes using it as the centerpiece of their ad message like Rossman-McKinney. Why do some candidates emphasize their experience while others do not?

We explore the effect of candidate sex. Women tend to wait to run for elected office until they have accrued more experience and qualifications than male candidates on average (Brown et al. 2019; Pearson and McGhee 2013), and with good reason; voters expect higher qualifications from women before giving them their support at the ballot box (Bauer 2020; Fulton 2012). If women accrue more experience in anticipation of sexist evaluations of voters, we should also expect to see women candidates communicate that experience, whether professional or political, to potential voters. However, communication of experience should depend on the actual accrued experience of the candidates (M. McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2020). Any gender effects should be moderated by the incumbency status of the candidate.

For empirical evidence, we turn to 2018 TV advertisements for state legislative candidates from the Wesleyan Media Project. We viewed and coded 1044 unique ads for whether the candidate mentioned prior professional or political experience. Contrary to expectations, the statistical analysis suggests that neither men nor women are more likely to mention their professional experience in TV ads. However, we find that men are more likely than women to highlight their prior political experience. This relationship is conditional on incumbency status; while men and women incumbents are both highly (and, statistically speaking, equally) likely to emphasize political experience, male challengers are more likely to highlight prior political experience than women challengers.

Much work remains to be done before accepting these tentative findings. Future iterations of this paper will code the actual professional and political backgrounds of candidates to better

account for candidates' propensity to advertise experience. The research will contribute to our understanding of the message that voters receive about who is qualified to run for office based on their background experience, as well as whether those qualifications vary by gender. However, they also present a puzzle for future research; if women are expected to accrue more experience before running for office, why do women candidates emphasize their political experience less than men in campaign ads?

Candidate Self-Presentation, Experience, and Sex

In social settings in North America, it is common to ask, “what do you do for a living?” when meeting a stranger. This practice, while deemed rude in some corners, is a staple of small talk. The response to this question can signal the direction of the conversation and whether substantive relationships can be formed for personal or professional reasons. Particularly in the professional classes, a job is more than something someone does to earn a wage: it is social capital, a hallmark of credibility, a demonstration of competence, and (potentially) a signal of trustworthiness. Job titles afford stations within society as individuals make assumptions about each other based on cultural perceptions of their career fields. Fiske and her colleagues (2012) show that Americans systematically stereotype individuals based on their job title on dimensions of warmth and competence—nurses are warm and competent but lawyers are cold and competent, for example.

In the context of seeking public office, candidates could highlight their prior experience, whether in elected office or in the working world, as a mechanism to introduce themselves to the public, garner trust, and earn votes. Voters consistently reward candidates with prior experience in political office (Jacobson 1989). Ambitious amateurs, particularly celebrities (Canon 1990),

and competitive amateurs, who are disproportionately non-elected government officials and lawyers (Roberds and Roberts 2002), also hold an electoral advantage. However, these advantages likely stem from these candidates' advantages in campaigning, such as superior fundraising ability and strategic self-selection into winnable races (Bonica 2020; Jacobson 1989; Maestas and Rugeley 2008). Evidence from survey experiments tends to show that voters do not place much weight on candidates' prior political or professional experiences in evaluating them (Carnes and Lupu 2016; Hansen and Treul 2021; Sadin 2016).³

We consider how candidates' sex might influence their decisions to highlight their prior experience. We start from the premise that women face systematic disadvantages in running for office. Women remain numerically underrepresented in public office at all levels of government (Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) 2022). Many attribute this underrepresentation to sexism against women candidates in the electorate. According to Hayes and Lawless (2016, 3), 47% of Americans agree that women "face bias from voters" and 31% agree that women "don't win as often as men."

Contradicting this viewpoint, scholarship since the 1990s has generally concluded that men and women perform equally well once they appear on the ballot (see Lawless 2015; Schwarz and Coppock 2022). More widely accepted explanations of underrepresentation among scholars point to differences in women's decisions to run for office. Well-qualified women are less likely than equally qualified men to consider themselves good candidates for public office (Fox and Lawless 2004) and more reluctant to compete in elections (Kanthak and Woon 2015).

³ Though voters don't strongly weigh the occupational backgrounds of candidates, they do consider other social class indicators like family background or personal wealth (e.g. Griffin, Newman, and Buhr 2020; Hoyt and DeShields 2021; Kevins 2021). When no other information is available about candidates, they may also weigh job titles more strongly (McDermott 2005).

Women’s roles and responsibilities in family life may complicate their decision to run—and run again—even if they desire to. For example, well-qualified women are less likely to run if they have children at home (Fulton et al. 2006) or they are breadwinners for their families (Bernhard, Shames, and Teele 2021). Women are also more likely to serve in state legislatures if the capital lies geographically closer to home (Silbermann 2015). Former Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy (D, FL--7) cited that being a mother of two small children was a primary reason for her deciding not to seek another term in Congress.⁴

Party leaders may fail to recruit women candidates, particularly when competition for party nominations is high, due to a belief that women are less electable than men (Fox and Lawless 2010; Sanbonmatsu 2002, 2006). Challenges may be compounded by the primary election system; women who seek party nominations in primaries face more high-quality challengers (Lawless and Pearson 2008). Finally, a historic lack of role models may have reinforced the idea of politics as a man’s domain. When women occupy high-profile office, more women run for lower-level office (Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018; Manento and Schenk 2021) and young women state a greater ambition to become politically active (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006).

Despite scholars’ location of the problem primarily at the emergence stage, the belief that women face sexism from voters, the media, and opposing candidates remains widespread (Hayes and Lawless 2016). Women candidates who perceive sexism as a challenge to their bids may try to compensate by demonstrating greater competence for the job. One compensation strategy is to amass more experience and qualifications before running. Women are more likely than men to

⁴ Ackley, Kate. “Citing ‘Personal Sacrifice,’ Rep. Stephanie Murphy Won’t Run Again.” *Roll Call*. December 20, 2021. Accessed 4/15/2022 at <https://rollcall.com/2021/12/20/citing-personal-sacrifice-rep-stephanie-murphy-wont-run-again/>.

have served in lower-level elected office before running for higher office (Pearson and McGhee 2013) and must win greater support from political activists and officeholders in their districts to perform on par with male candidates (Fulton 2012). Women enter elections more strategically than men, choosing winnable races in politically friendly districts (Ondercin 2022; Pearson and McGhee 2013). After state legislative service, women are more cautious about entering Congressional races than their male colleagues (Brown et al. 2019). Once in legislative office, women tend to outperform men by securing more government allocations for their districts, sponsoring and cosponsoring more bills, and shepherding their bills closer to passage when serving in the minority party (Anzia and Berry 2011; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013).

Voters might expect women to have greater qualifications before running as well. In a pair of experiments, Bauer (2020) shows that voters regard female legislators more positively for a greater set of legislative accomplishments, but do not reward those legislators with their votes or consider them more viable candidates as a result. Even when respondents agreed that a hypothetical female candidate had greater accomplishments than a hypothetical male candidate, the female candidate received equal electoral support to the male. Much of the public also believes that other voters expect women to have greater qualifications than men. Drawing on 2014 survey data, Hayes and Lawless show that 48% of Americans agree with the statement that women “must be more qualified than men to win” elections (Hayes and Lawless 2016, 3).

If women compensated for perceived weakness with the electorate by working harder and obtaining stronger credentials before running for office, we should also expect them to communicate that experience more to voters during their campaigns. Anecdotal evidence comes from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential bid. Her campaign took pains to emphasize her qualifications in juxtaposition with her general election opponent, and first-

time political candidate, Donald Trump. For example, during his speech at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, former President Barack Obama said, “there has never been a man or a woman—not me, not Bill, nobody—more qualified than Hillary Clinton to serve as president of the United States of America.”⁵

Some evidence supports the idea that women candidates message differently than men to address gendered expectations from the electorate. Earlier studies found that women emphasize social issues, particular “women’s issues” and feminine characteristics in their campaigns (Dabelko and Herrnson 1997; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Larson 2001). However, more recent studies show no differences between male and female candidates in the issues and traits they choose to emphasize on their campaign websites, television ads and tweets (Dolan 2005, 200; Evans, Cordova, and Sipole 2014; Hayes and Lawless 2016; M. McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2020; Niven and Zilber 2001; Sapiro et al. 2011). However, candidates may alter their campaign messaging depending on the dyadic match of their sex and their opponents’ sex (Porter, Treul, and McDonald 2021; Windett 2014)

Despite a good amount of evidence on gendered presentation of issues and traits, scholars have spent less time studying how women candidates communicate their experience specifically. The most direct evidence on experience comes from M. McDonald, Porter and Treul (2020), who ask whether women are more likely to emphasize prior political experience on their Congressional campaign websites. Restricting the analysis to Democrats, they find that candidates with prior elected experience are more likely to highlight their experience than

⁵ WTTW News Staff. “Obama: Hillary Clinton Most Qualified Presidential Candidate Ever.” *WTTW*. July 27, 106. Accessed 4/15/2022 at <https://news.wttw.com/2016/07/27/obama-hillary-clinton-most-qualified-presidential-candidate-ever>.

amateur candidates, regardless of sex. Among experienced candidates, they find no difference between men and women.

However, it remains unknown how much women candidates highlight their experience in campaign communications outside websites. We focus on television advertisements. For a political campaign, TV ads represent one of the most quintessential aspects of the electoral cycle experience. TV ads are often no longer than thirty seconds and candidates must grapple with what to say and how to say it. Often cost-prohibitive, candidates typically produce only a handful of television ads (especially in campaigns for lower-level office). Therefore, a great deal of calculus must go into the overall structure and narrative framing of the advertisement: who is this candidate and why should someone vote for them?

Furthermore, we know very little about how candidates message the professional experiences that candidates had before running for office. McDonald et al. (2020) focus solely on prior officeholding. However, candidates can use their pre-officeholding experience or job titles to message competence, build confidence among voters, identify issue priorities, and claim specialized knowledge about an issue area. Voters generally do not place much weight on candidates' specific job titles in making decisions between candidates (Carnes and Lupu 2016; Sadin 2016). However, job titles can make a difference when voters lack other information about the candidates (McDermott 2005). Work experience may also contribute to forming voters' overall impression of a candidate. For example, in 2016 then-candidate Donald Trump stressed his experience in business as a qualification for the presidency. When respondents were provided information that Trump's wealth was largely inherited from his father rather than built from his business, they perceived him as less competent in business and consequently lowered their support for his presidency (J. McDonald, Karol, and Mason 2020). It is worth investigating how

gender might shape candidates' willingness to communicate their professional experience in addition to their political experience.

In sum, candidates have incentives to present their experience (either professional or political) to voters to establish their competence and qualifications for an elected office. Women often wait to run for office until they have more experience, qualifications, or accomplishments than men on average. As a result, women may be more likely to prioritize conveying that experience to voters in high-cost communications. We test the hypotheses:

[H1a] Women will be more likely to mention their professional backgrounds in campaign ads than men seeking public office.

[H1b] Women will be more likely to mention their political experience in campaign ads than men seeking public office.

However, we expect the ability of candidates to communicate that experience to depend on the actual experiences that candidates have accumulated. A first-time candidate cannot credibly talk about their experience in prior office in a TV ad. Because we have not yet completed data collection on candidates' prior experiences, we test whether presentation of experience depends on incumbency status. Incumbents already have the job they are running for, and so have less need to present their qualifications for the job. We expect they will instead focus their messaging on their accomplishments and issue priorities in office regardless of sex. We expect that gender differences in highlighting experience might be more likely to appear among challengers. We test the conditional hypotheses:

[H2a] Women challengers will be more likely to mention their professional backgrounds than male challengers, but women incumbents will be no more likely to mention their professional backgrounds than male incumbents.

[H2b] Women challengers will be more likely to mention their political backgrounds than male challengers, but women incumbents will be no more likely to mention their political backgrounds than male incumbents.

Data

To evaluate how candidates of both sexes presented their experience, we viewed 1,044 televised state legislative campaign advertisements aired during the 2018 election cycle. While many studies analyze the contents of Congressional ads, we chose state legislative ads because state legislators are not well known to the public. As a result, they may be more likely than Congressional candidates to spend time introducing themselves to the public, including by discussing their professional and political backgrounds. Moreover, state legislative campaign spending has continued to increase over the last decade, creating an opportunity for political scientists to study more widespread televised advertising among state legislative candidates.⁶ Finally, thousands of Americans run for state legislature every year. Investigating campaign messaging at this level allows us to observe greater variation in messaging choices and to make inferences about more typical campaigns, in contrast with studies of high-salience but low-frequency campaigns for statewide or national office.

We obtained ad data from the Wesleyan Media Project, which partners with Kantar Media/CMAG to capture television ads in each electoral cycle (Fowler et al. 2020). CMAG's automated system track ads on local channels, national networks, and national cable channels. It

⁶ Montemayor, Stacy, Pete Quist, Karl Evers-Hillstrom, and Douglas Weber. "Joint Report Reveals Record Donations in 2020 State and Federal Races." *National Institution of Money in Politics and Center for Responsive Politics*. November 19, 2020. Accessed 4/13/22 at <https://www.followthemoney.org/research/institute-reports/joint-report-reveals-record-donations-in-2020-state-and-federal-races>.

monitors and records each unique ad that airs, including its date, time, media market, station, and television show.

To create a subset of the data for coding, we eliminated duplicates so that each observation is a unique ad. As a result, we cannot analyze how frequently candidates run ads that emphasize experience. However we can analyze the proportion of each candidate's ads that emphasize experience. We also limited our analysis to ads sponsored directly by the candidate's campaign organization, removing ads sponsored by party organizations or outside groups. Though outside groups share a goal of electing the candidate and may even coordinate directly with the campaign, outside groups also have incentives to highlight different facets of the candidate. For example, a pro-life advocacy group would have more incentive to spotlight a candidate's pro-life positions than her pre-candidacy experience. In contrast, candidates have greater incentive to present themselves as individuals with unique and compelling sets of experiences and traits that merit their election to office.

We coded the ads to construct two binary dependent variables. The first, *Professional Experience*, is intended to capture whether the candidate discusses jobs or careers they held before running for public office. We recorded a "1" if a candidate mentions a job title or an industry in which they worked. Professional experience would be counted regardless of how much focus was placed on it in the ad. We counted ads that centered the work experience as the central message, as in the case of a Kentucky welder who used his work experience to frame his desire to work in a bipartisan manner in the state legislature; we also counted ads where candidates primarily discussed issues but flashed a job title (e.g. "small business owner") briefly on screen.⁷

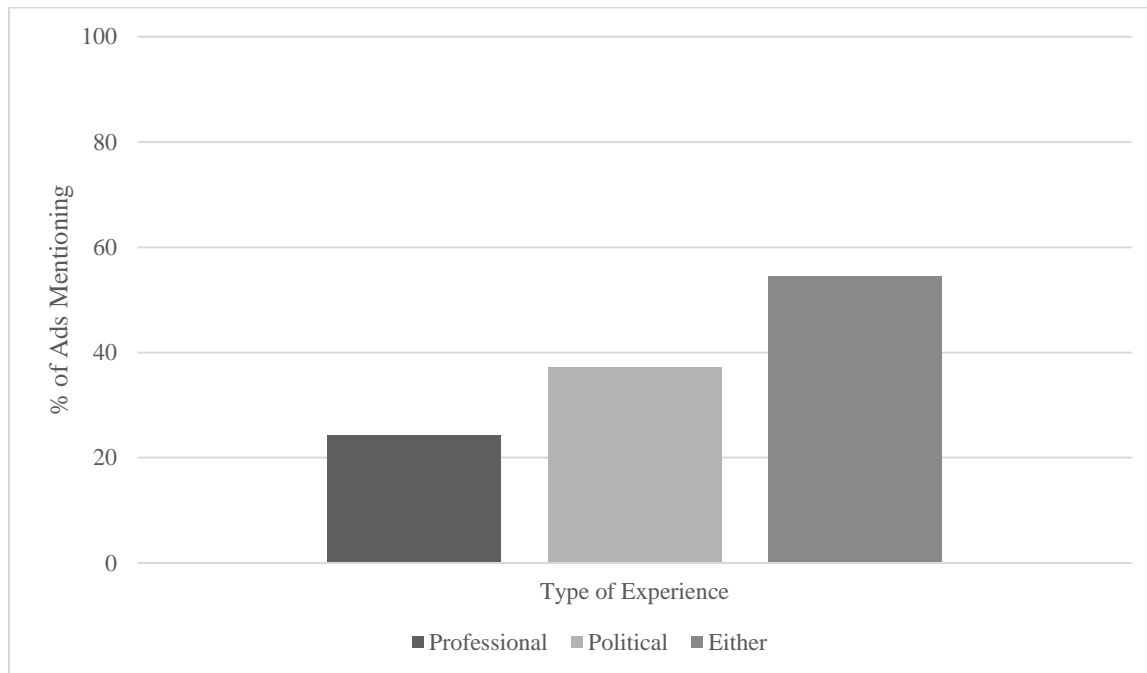
⁷ We also recorded the raw job titles mentioned in the ads. We have not included summaries of candidates' occupation in this paper, but plan to analyze them in future work.

The second, *Political Experience*, is intended to capture candidates' prior service in elected office. Our rule of thumb for coding an ad as revealing political experience was whether a viewer could infer that the candidate had served in public office before. Sometimes, this came in the form of an explicit naming of a prior office (e.g. "I served mayor of Springfield, and now I'm running to be your state senator.") Other times, this came from candidates' discussions of their votes or actions as a public official. (e.g. "I sponsored a bill to cut taxes.")

Two coders watched all 1044 ads in the data set individually in an initial round of coding. Comparing initial results, the coders agreed 87.5% of the time that an ad mentioned professional experience and agreed 78.7% of the time that an ad mentioned political experience. The coders then rewatched the ads on which they disagreed and made a joint, final coding decision.

We constructed the primary independent variable, *Female*, based on the sex of the candidate sponsoring the ad. This measurement choice has limitations, as it captures the biological sex of the candidate rather than their gender presentation. Even within sexes, gender identity and presentation may have serious consequences for how voters interpret messages about experience and use those messages to decide their vote choice (e.g. Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018). However, sex provides a good starting point for evaluating the argument. To our knowledge, none of the candidates in our data identified as trans, nonbinary, or otherwise outside the traditional gender binary. The secondary independent variable, *Incumbent*, is coded 1 if the candidate is running for reelection to the office they currently hold. Table A1 in the appendix displays descriptive statistics for these variables as well as controls used in the multiple regression analyses below.

Figure 1: Frequency of Ads Mentioning Candidate Experience



Notes: Data from the Wesleyan Media Project and the authors.

Findings

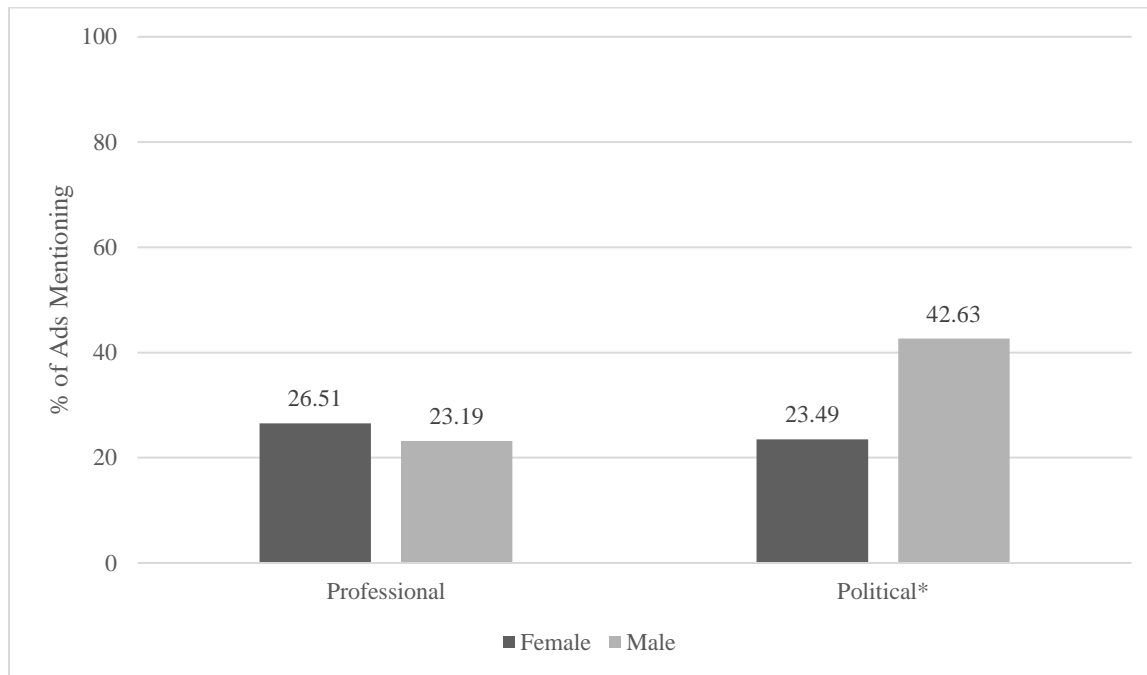
To begin, we describe the frequency of mentions of candidate experience in the ads.

Figure 1 displays the findings. Most ads (54.41%) mentioned either the candidate's professional experience or prior experience in elected office. It was more common for ads to mention political (37.16%) than professional (24.14%) experience. Overall, candidate mentions of prior experience were common but not omnipresent. Candidates often choose to emphasize experience in TV ads, but the frequency suggests that candidates do not perceive disclosing experience as a necessary element of the ad.

We take a first step toward evaluating the hypotheses by conducting a bivariate analysis of the frequency of experience mentions by candidate sex. Figure 2 displays the results.

Beginning with professional experience, we see that ads sponsored by women are slightly more

Figure 2: Ads Mentioning Experience by Candidate Sex



Notes: Data from the Wesleyan Media Project and the authors. Asterisks indicate a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) by candidate sex.

likely than ads sponsored by men to mention the candidate's prior work experience. However, the difference is small—3.32 percentage points—and not statistically distinct from zero. Moving to political experience, we find opposite from our expectations. Ads sponsored by men are much more likely than ads sponsored by women to mention that the candidate held prior office. The difference is substantively large—19.14 percentage points—and statistically significant.

The bivariate results lend little support to our initial expectations. However, several considerations should give us pause before accepting these initial findings. First, because ads are the unit of analysis instead of candidates and one candidate could sponsor several ads, the results could be driven by a small number of candidates disproportionately advertising their experience. Second, confounding factors like the varying length of the ads, the partisanship of the candidates, and the districts they choose to run in help to explain these differences. Third, it could be that

women and men vary in their actual professional and political experiences. We do not expect men and women to differ significantly on whether they have prior work experience. Expectations are more mixed on prior political experience. On one hand, for a variety of reasons, women are underrepresented at all levels of public office relative to their presence in the population. It could be that women candidates advertise their political experience less simply because they have had fewer opportunities than men to hold prior office. On the other hand, women are more likely to have lower-level political experience than men when running for higher-level office. It could be that the bivariate analysis *understates* the experience advertisement gap. [We do not yet have the appropriate data on candidates' actual professional and political backgrounds to account for their baseline probability of advertising it. We intend to gather and incorporate this data in the analysis in future iterations of this paper.]

We estimate several multiple regression models in an initial attempt to account for some of these factors. We regress our binary indicators of experience mentions (professional, political and either) on indicators for candidate sex, incumbency status, and their interaction. We fit multilevel logistic regression models, nesting ads within candidates and candidates within states. We control for the party of the sponsoring candidate (*Democrat* = 1, any other party = 0) because Democratic candidates have been more likely to run with prior political experience than Republican candidates in recent elections (Porter and Treul 2019). We also control for *Ad Length*, measured in seconds, under the assumption that longer ads provide greater opportunity for candidates to mention their experience. [We will continue to collect data to build out our set of control variables. We appreciate any suggestions on this front.]

Table 1 displays the results. We begin by assessing whether ads sponsored by women candidates will be more likely to mention prior professional experience. The results provide no

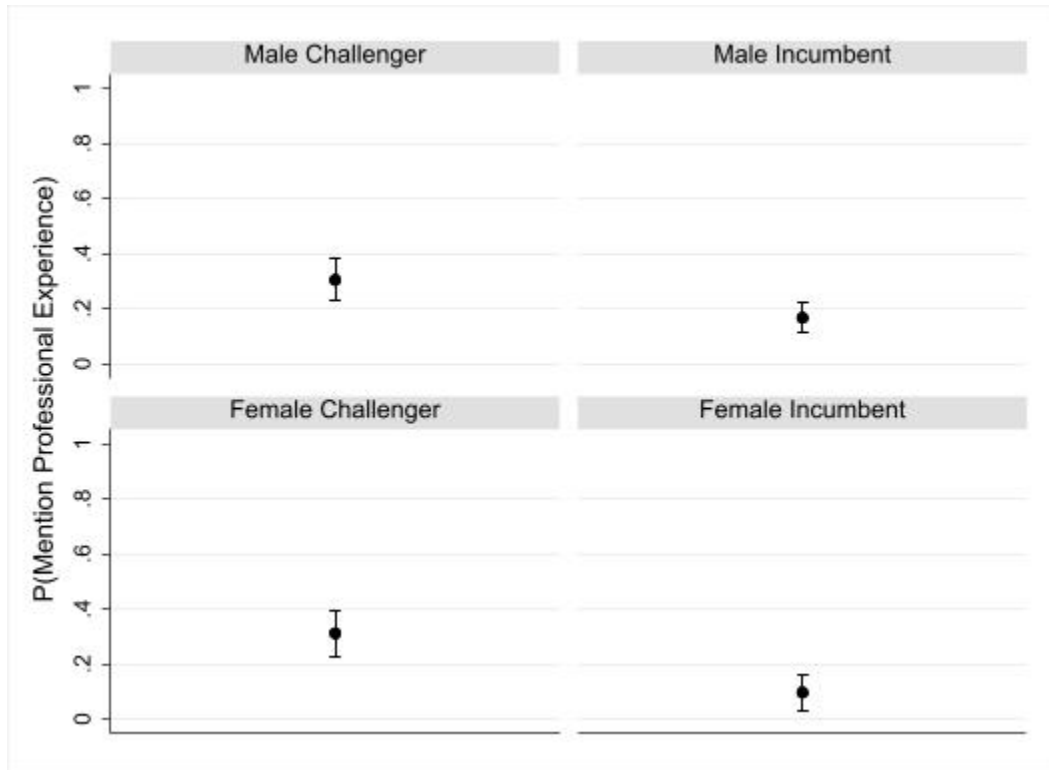
Table 1: Candidate Sex and Presentation of Experience in TV Ads

	Professional Experience		Political Experience	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-0.15 (0.21)	0.05 (0.22)	-1.05* (0.35)	-1.42* (0.51)
Incumbent	-1.27* (0.27)	-1.06* (0.28)	4.25* (0.29)	4.04* (0.38)
Female X Incumbent		-0.87 (0.59)		0.84 (0.71)
Democrat	0.11 (0.28)	0.11 (0.27)	-0.10 (0.31)	-0.10 (0.31)
Ad Length	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	-1.92* (0.55)	-2.02* (0.58)	-3.21* (0.69)	-3.09* (0.70)
N	1,019	1,019	1,019	1,019
Number of groups	38	38	38	38
State RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Candidate RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Robust-clustered standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$

support for the hypotheses. In the first column of Table 1, which predicts mention of professional experience, we see a negatively signed coefficient estimate. However, the estimate is not statistically significant. This finding further supports the conclusion that ads sponsored by women are no more likely to highlight the candidate's professional experience than ads sponsored by men. Among the controls, we find that incumbency status is negatively associated with mentioning professional experience. Neither candidate party affiliation or ad length predicts the outcome of interest.

Figure 3: Predicted Probability of Mentioning Professional Experience



Notes: Data from the Wesleyan Media Project and the authors. The predicted probabilities assume a Republican candidate messaging in a 30-second ad

In the second column, we test whether the relationship between sex and highlighting professional experience might be moderated by incumbency status. Because interaction terms are difficult to interpret on their own, we estimate the predicted probabilities of mentioning professional experience among male and female challengers and incumbents in Figure 3. In contrast with expectations, mentions of professional experience are nearly equally likely among female ($p=0.31$) and male ($p=0.30$) challengers. We see a small difference in the likelihood of mentions of professional experience among female ($p=0.10$) and male (0.17) incumbents, though the estimates are too imprecise to accept a statistical difference. The noteworthy finding here is that, regardless of sex, challengers are more likely to advertise professional experience than incumbents. Therefore, we find no support for hypotheses 1a or 2a.

Turning to mentions of prior political experience in the third column of Table 1, we see a negative and statistically significant coefficient estimate for the *Female* variable. In contrast with expectations, this result tells us that ads sponsored by women are significantly less likely to mention prior political experience in elected office than ads sponsored by men. Among the controls, we find that incumbents are significantly more likely to mention their prior political experience than challengers.

Finally, we assess whether incumbency status moderates the relationship between sex and mentioning political experience. The regression results are displayed in the fourth column of Table 1, but we turn to predicted probabilities in Figure 4 to interpret the results. Among incumbents, we observe high probabilities of mentioning political experience. Women incumbents are less likely to mention political experience ($p(\text{mention})=0.68$) than their male counterparts ($p=0.75$), but the confidence intervals are sufficiently large that, statistically speaking, we cannot rule out that there are no differences by sex. Among challengers, we find that women are less likely to mention political experience ($p=0.10$) than men ($p=0.22$). The difference is statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. Therefore, we find no support for hypotheses 1b or 2b.

A potential shortcoming of this analysis is that we do not distinguish between attack ads focused on the candidate's rivals and promotional ads focused on presenting the candidate's positive attributes and positions to voters. We think it is necessary to include attack ads in the sample. With finite campaign resources and voter attention, a candidate's decision to release an attack ad is simultaneously a decision not to focus on the candidate's own attributes like experience. However, it may also be reasonable to ask whether candidates highlight their prior experience conditional upon the choice to run a promotional ad. In Table A2 in the appendix we

Figure 4: Predicted Probability of Mentioning Political Experience



limit the sample to promotional ads and estimate the model using the same specifications as in Table 1. We continue to find no difference between male and female candidates in their presentation of professional experience. We also continue to observe a negative relationship between sponsorship by female candidates and mentioning political experience, but the estimates are imprecise and do not allow us to reject the null at the .05 level of confidence.

To summarize the results, we found no evidence that women are more likely to talk about their professional experience than men in televised campaign ads, finding instead that being a challenger in a race most strongly predicts mention of professional experience. However, we found differences by candidate sex in the likelihood of discussing prior political experience in ads. However, the findings contradicted our expectations; male candidates were more likely to discuss their political experience than women, especially male challengers.

Discussion

These initial results present a puzzle. On the one hand, because women are underrepresented in political office for a variety of reasons, the results might simply reflect men's greater opportunities to have served in office. On the other hand, if women are more likely than men to have gained lower-level elected experience before running, then the gender gap in presenting political experience is even more surprising. The results could also reflect a double bind; even if women feel a need to be more experienced when they run, they may downplay their experience lest they invite more intense voter scrutiny.

However, much more work remains to be done before we accept these tentative findings. We are actively collecting data on the real-world professional and political backgrounds of candidates in our data to serve as a stronger measure of the experience that candidates bring to their campaigns. Moreover, we treat all professional and political experience as equal. Because we have collected the raw data on the jobs that candidates mention in the ads, future tests will distinguish types of professional experience (e.g. "pipeline professions" like law vs. other types of work) and political experience (e.g. school board vs. mayor).

We caution that these TV ads come from a rather small number of state legislative candidates. The cost of state legislative campaigns varies dramatically nationwide. The traits advertised on TV in this sample may not be representative of the traits state legislative candidates nationwide would advertise with sufficient money. State legislative candidates with the money to air TV ads might disproportionately hold experience.

If the findings held through further testing, this research would add a wrinkle to the field's understanding of gender and self-presentation of experience. While recent research has suggested that men's and women's campaign messaging strategies do not systematically (e.g.

Dolan 2005; Hayes and Lawless 2016), including their messaging around experience (M. McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2020), our findings would invite reconsideration of those findings. It would also invite further research to explain why women advertise their political experience less often in high-cost messaging over the airwaves.

We also contribute to the field's understanding of how candidates advertise their occupational backgrounds to voters. Research is just starting to unpack the effect of occupational background on lawmakers' behavior in office (Barnes, Beall, and Holman 2021; Carnes 2013; Hansen, Carnes, and Gray 2019) and how voters evaluate candidates' occupational backgrounds (Carnes and Lupu 2016; McDermott 2005; Sadin 2016). However, this line of research lags far behind the study of women in office in assessing the messages that voters receive about candidates' backgrounds. To our knowledge, only two studies have examined media coverage of candidates' occupational backgrounds (Carnes 2019; McDermott 1999) and none have studied its presentation in campaign ads. Future research in this area would help us understand the messages voters are receiving about who is qualified to run for office.

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APPENDIX

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable Name	Mean	Min	Max	Std. Dev.
<i>Professional Experience</i>	0.24	0	1	--
<i>Political Experience</i>	0.37	0	1	--
<i>Female</i>	0.29	0	1	--
<i>Incumbent</i>	0.39	0	1	--
<i>Democrat</i>	0.44	0	1	--
<i>Ad Length (in seconds)</i>	28.94	10	60	5.76

Table A2: Mentions of Candidate Experience among Promotional Ads

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Professional Experience		Political Experience	
Female	0.03 (0.47)	0.41 (0.52)	-0.81 (0.49)	-1.35 (0.68)
Incumbent	-1.36* (0.59)	-1.04 (0.66)	6.22* (2.32)	5.79* (1.77)
Female X Incumbent		-1.23 (0.99)		1.55 (1.14)
Democrat	0.26 (0.55)	0.30 (0.53)	-0.56 (0.50)	-0.63 (0.50)
Ad Length	0.06 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)
Constant	-3.06* (1.27)	-3.28* (1.33)	-2.63 (1.30)	-2.35 (1.19)
Observations	506	506	506	506
Number of groups	37	37	37	37
State RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Candidate RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<0.05