Job Talk: Candidate Gender and Presentation of Prior Experience in Television Ads[1]

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Abstract

Does gender influence how candidates in the US present their prior political experience to voters? Messaging one's experience might demonstrate a history of power-seeking behavior, a gender role violation for women under traditional norms. As a result, men should be more likely to make experience-based appeals than women candidates. For evidence, we analyze the contents of 1,030 televised advertisements from 2018 state legislative candidates from the Wesleyan Media Project. We find that ads sponsored by experienced men are significantly more likely to highlight experience than ads sponsored by experienced women. However, we find that women's and men's ads are roughly equally likely to discuss work experience, suggesting that men's greater emphasis on experience is limited to prior officeholding. The results contribute to our understanding of gender dynamics in political campaigns, the information available to voters, and how advertising shapes the criteria voters use to assess candidates.

Why do some candidates emphasize their prior officeholding experience to voters while others do not? Most candidates make biographical details available to voters on the campaign trail, but many decline to emphasize that experience when presenting themselves to voters. For example, when Pennsylvania State Representative Tina Davis challenged State Senator Tommy Tomlinson for his seat in 2018, one TV ad portrayed her as a "mom on a mission to shake up the Senate," rather than as a four-term, sitting state legislator with the requisite experience for the position.[i] Understanding why candidates choose to emphasize experience or not is important to understanding the considerations available to voters as they weigh whom to support.

We investigate the role of gender in structuring candidates' choices to emphasize experience, grounding our expectations in social role theory and role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau 2002; Eagly and Wood 2012; Schneider and Bos 2019). By emphasizing experience in political office, women candidates would violate traditional gender norms against women demonstrating power-seeking behavior. As a result, we should expect to see women highlight their experience less than men. For empirical evidence, we turn to TV advertisements for state legislative candidates in 2018 from the Wesleyan Media Project (Fowler et al. 2020).[ii] We find that, among candidates who had held prior elected office, ads sponsored by men are significantly more likely than ads sponsored by women to emphasize the candidate's prior political experience. However, ads sponsored by men and women are similarly likely to discuss other types of work experience.

The results complicate how political scientists understand the interplay between gender and experience on the campaign trail. Though gender differences do not appear in presentation of political experience in congressional campaign websites (Bauer 2020; M. McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2020), the present results suggest that candidates' discussion of experience depends on the

medium, with men emphasizing their experience more than women in TV ads. Gender differences in the discussion of experience may undermine women candidates' qualifications for public office in the minds of voters, contributing in a small way to the underrepresentation of women in office.

Gendered Social Roles and Self-Presentation in Campaigns

Women remain numerically underrepresented in public office at all levels of government (Center for American Women and Politics 2022). Many attribute this underrepresentation to sexism against women candidates from 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." However, 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). Women's underrepresentation may be better explained by gender differences in the decision to run for office. Women disproportionately decline to run compared to similarly situated men for a variety of reasons, including family care obligations (Bernhard, Shames, and Teele 2021; Fulton et al. 2006), absent recruitment efforts from party leaders (Fox and Lawless 2010; Sanbonmatsu 2002), and a relative lack of role models in high-level offices (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018).

Another potential reason women decline to run—one that we argue also relates to women candidates' messaging choices—is that holding political office violates traditional gender norms. Social role theory holds that gender stereotypes and traits develop from a division of labor by sex in traditional societies—men provide by laboring in the public sphere, while women occupy caretaking roles (Eagly and Wood 2012). Building on that idea, role congruity theory explains

that women will face social sanctions for defying gender norms by engaging in agentic behaviors, such as holding leadership positions or positions of power (Eagly and Karau 2002; Schneider and Bos 2019).[iii]

Together, these theories can help to explain several patterns in women's self-selection into political candidacy. Men are more likely than women to express an interest in running for office (Fox and Lawless 2005; Schneider et al. 2016). Resulting pressure from gendered expectations may lead potential women candidates to underrate their own qualifications for running (Fox and Lawless 2004) and make more risk-averse choices about when and where to run (Brown et al. 2019; Fox and Oxley 2003; Fulton 2012; Ondercin 2022; Pearson and McGhee 2013). When explaining their interest for running for office, women are also more likely to express communal motivations (e.g. working with others, serving the community) than agentic motivations (e.g. gaining experience, changing the system) (Conroy and Green 2020).

Gender role congruity should also inform how women candidates present themselves to voters. We focus on the presentation of experience. By experience, we mean a career that provided some skills or preparation to the candidate before running for office. Candidates discuss their pre-electoral experience to telegraph competence and build voters' confidence in the candidate's readiness for office. In our view, "experience" is closely related to a "qualification," a frequently invoked term in the gender literature (e.g. Bauer 2020), since both point toward a candidate's fitness to handle the responsibilities of an office.

Oftentimes, experience connotes prior service in elected office. In the political realm, prior officeholding experience signals that the candidate is already prepared for public service and can take on the responsibilities of elected office with lower starting costs. However, experience (and achievement) in a nonpolitical occupation can also build perceptions of

competence. 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 lowered their support for his presidency (J. McDonald, Karol, and Mason 2020).

Women candidates face a different set of challenges than men in communicating experience on the campaign trail because experience is a gendered characteristic, particularly in politics. Americans have long associated leadership with masculinity (Bauer 2020). Experience connotes competence, power, ambition, status, and leadership, all terms that take on an agentic and thus masculine tone (Conroy and Green 2020). Given these often-unconscious expectations, women candidates face an uphill battle proving themselves to the public because voters do not automatically assume women are qualified or competent to hold office (Ditonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk 2014; Mo 2015).

A reasonable response to low expectations from voters would be for women candidates to explain why they are qualified to hold office based on their experience. However, a claim of strong qualifications from prior officeholding would be a claim that one has engaged in power-seeking behavior in the past, itself a gender norm violation for women (Schneider and Bos 2019). Declaring one's qualifications could invite backlash from voters for norm-violating behavior. As an alternative, women candidates might choose to downplay or omit their experience when campaigning in an effort to avoid anticipated backlash from voters. While we generally expect discussion of experience to violate gender norms, we acknowledge that women candidates could evoke experience in ways that conform with gender norms, such as discussing how their experience helped them collaborate or achieve communal goals. Discussion of

experience might also be aimed to demonstrate a candidate's commitment to action on a specific issue or to loyalty to a group of voters.

In political science research, the extent to which voters truly penalize women candidates for discussing their experience remains an open question. When campaigning, women candidates face diminished prospects in electoral contexts when voters expect more agentic behavior from their leaders, such as in times of terrorism or when choosing leaders for high levels of office (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; J. McDonald and Piatak 2022). Messaging experience may produce a countervailing effect that helps women overcome stereotypes of incompetence (Bauer 2017, 2020; Ditonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk 2014; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2017; Mo 2015).[iv] Still, that messaging may come at a cost. When women promote their own experience, evaluations of their competence tend to improve but evaluations of their social attractiveness or likeability simultaneously decline (Bauer 2017; Rudman 1998).

Regardless of the extent to which voters penalize women for messaging experience, candidates' perceptions of what voters expect should determine candidates' messaging choices more than voters' true expectations. Candidates operate in environments of uncertainty about voters' beliefs and expectations (Hershey 1974). Politicians' sometimes-misplaced beliefs and assumptions about voters guide their behavior (Miler 2010).

Therefore, even if voters' gendered expectations do not ultimately affect the outcomes of elections, candidates often choose to message as if they might. Dittmar's (2015) study of how campaign professionals address gender dynamics supports this claim. The campaign consultants and strategists she interviewed expected voters to apply gender stereotypes to candidates, even though they held mixed opinions on whether gender stereotypes ultimately affected election

outcomes. Nonetheless, they accounted for gender in their messaging choices to counteract or forestall potential threats from violations of gender stereotypes. In Dittmar's telling, recognizing and reacting to potential voter stereotypes often involved not a direct challenge to gender stereotypes, but an adaptation of a message to provide maximum advantage to women candidates within the confines of a gendered political landscape. She writes, "While my interviews revealed little disruption in *which* credentials are expected of political candidates, they did demonstrate some potential shifts in the *sites from which* those credentials can be earned" (2015, 125, emphasis in original). Applied to messaging surrounding experience, we might expect women candidates not to evoke their prior officeholding experience directly but instead to discuss how forms of nontraditional experience qualify them for office. Pennsylvania State Rep. Tina Davis' self-presentation as a "mom on a mission," rather than a long-serving state legislator, would fit that mold.

To summarize the argument, candidates have incentives to present their experience to voters to establish their competence and qualifications for an elected office. However, the risk of violating gender role norms presents women candidates with opposing incentives to downplay or avoid discussion of their prior officeholding experience. On the campaign trail, public communications from women candidates should feature less information about their experience than similarly qualified men. We test the hypothesis:

> *H1: Ads sponsored by women seeking public office will be less likely to mention the*
> *candidate's prior political experience than ads sponsored by men.*

While it is common for prior officeholders to emphasize their experience in ads, it is also common for candidates to emphasize their experience outside of elected office—for example as business leaders or professionals. It is unclear whether women candidates would violate gender norms in advertising their work experience. A simplistic read of role congruity theory might yield the expectation that gender role violations would occur with any discussion of women's agency, regardless of whether those pursuits are in political or professional realm. Yet, Schneider and Bos (2019, 184) point out a distinction in agentic goals between dominance-oriented goals and independence or individual mastery goals. With the increased entry of women into the workforce over the last century, including greater representation in high-status professions, men and women alike share an interest in achievement. However, achievement does not necessarily indicate holding power-oriented goals; achievement may be instrumental to attaining communal goals. Women tend to endorse individual mastery goals and pursue careers that allow for achievement instead of dominance (Schneider et al. 2016).

Applied to the discussion of experience on the campaign trail, women candidates might be hesitant to discuss political experience—more closely aligned with holding power-oriented goals—but less hesitant to discuss professional experience—which could indicate either power-oriented goals or achievement-oriented goals. Candidates could also intend for a discussion of their career to reinforce a personal brand, to lead voters to evaluate the candidate favorably based on positive stereotypes they have of the candidate's occupation, or to appeal to specific constituencies in a district. Relevantly, Bauer (2020) finds that women candidates, relative to men, are more likely to emphasize professional experience on their campaign websites than their political experience.

We acknowledge too, however, that achievement could be taken as a gender norm violation if discussion of it is perceived as self-promoting or bragging. Yet, we might reasonably expect a discussion of political experience to evoke power-seeking goals more than other types of experience given its more direct connection to decision-making authority and political ambition. We ultimately hold mixed expectations about the extent to which women candidates will emphasize their professional experience relative to men, but to allow for comparability of results, we test a hypothesis directionally in line with our expectations around political experience. We test the hypothesis:

H2: Ads sponsored by women seeking public office will be less likely to mention the candidate's work experience than ads sponsored by men.

Though we expect women candidates to downplay their experience in campaign ads, our hypotheses are falsifiable. Relevant literature has offered evidence supporting competing expectations. Bauer (2020) advances and finds support for a strategic emergence hypothesis in which women emphasize their experience no less than (and perhaps even more than) men. There are two reasons for this expectation. First, women candidates may anticipate a gendered landscape and assert their qualifications to compete on an even footing with men and head off voters' stereotypes about incompetence (see Ditonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk 2014). Second, because of unequal expectations surrounding women's qualifications, better qualified women with more agentic motivations would select into running for office and run stronger campaigns than their male counterparts (Conroy and Green 2020; Fulton 2012; Pearson and McGhee 2013). As a result, self-selection would produce women candidates willing to emphasize their

credentials and no gender gap in messaging surrounding experience would emerge. Such a null finding would also be consistent with a range of studies finding few or no differences between male and female candidates in the issues and traits they choose to emphasize (Dolan 2005; Evans, Cordova, and Sipole 2014; M. McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2020; Niven and Zilber 2001; Sapiro et al. 2011).

Data and Methods

We test these hypotheses using evidence from television advertisements. Scholars have recently used TV ads in the study of campaign messaging and gender in part because they offer some advantages to understand candidate self-portrayals over other media (Bauer and Santia 2023; English, Branton, and Friesenhahn 2024). Unlike news coverage, messaging in TV ads falls under the control of candidates. While both TV ads and campaign websites are highly accessible to the public, TV ads are more likely to be viewed by more casual observers of politics and may be more relevant to how an average voter perceives a candidate. Finally, and most importantly for this study, the short format of TV ads forces candidates to choose their priorities in messaging to the electorate. Campaign websites are constrained by space but allow candidates to provide much more information about themselves than TV ads. Therefore, TV ads allow us to observe better what "bottom-line" message a candidate wants to convey to the public. A limitation of using TV ads as data is that their production cost limits our ability to observe messaging choices from poorly funded candidates. Any results may or may not generalize to candidates with limited campaign funds.

To evaluate how candidates of both genders presented their previous experience, we watched and coded 1,030 unique TV ads for state legislative campaigns aired during the 2018

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

We chose the 2018 midterm because it produced a unique candidate pool for these state-level races. As a midterm election occurring under Donald Trump's presidency, the 2018 election cycle saw a record number of women register to run for public office, allowing for greater variation in candidate gender and, in particular, women candidates' background experiences. However, given the unique gender dynamics of that election cycle, it is possible that the sample of candidates in our data does not generalize to other election cycles.

While many studies analyze the contents of Congressional ads, we chose state legislative ads because the candidates they represent are usually not well known to the public. Candidates at that level must spend more time introducing themselves to voters than congressional or presidential candidates, including by discussing their biographies. Moreover, state legislative campaign spending has continued to increase over the last decade, creating an opportunity to study more widespread televised advertising among state legislative candidates.[v] Finally, thousands of Americans, both men and women, 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 lower-level campaigns, in contrast with studies of higher-salience but lower-frequency campaigns for statewide or national office.

To create a data set for coding, we eliminated duplicates so that each observation is a unique ad.[vi] We also limited our analysis to ads sponsored directly by the candidate's campaign

organization, removing ads sponsored by party organizations or outside groups.[vii] Finally, to observe the relationship between a sponsor's gender and message more cleanly, we removed ads jointly sponsored by multiple candidates, such as ads sponsored by copartisan candidates running in multimember districts. The resulting 1,030 ads represent all unique ads available from the Wesleyan Media Project that fit these criteria. Ads came from the campaigns of 529 different candidates, with each candidate recording between one and 20 unique ads.

We coded the ads to construct two binary dependent variables. The first, *Political Experience*, is intended to capture candidates' prior service in elected office. We coded ads as mentioning political experience if the ad presented information that either states explicitly *or* logically implies the candidate had served in public office before. Sometimes, this came in the form of an explicit naming of a prior office they held. Other times, this came from candidates' discussions of their votes or actions as a public official, even if they did not explicitly name the office they held.

The second dependent variable, *Work 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. Work experience would be counted regardless of how much focus was placed on it in the ad. For example, we counted an ad that centered the work experience in the 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 an ad in which the candidate primarily discussed issues but flashed a job title (e.g. "small business owner") briefly on screen.

Two coders watched all 1,030 ads individually in their original video format in an initial round of coding. Comparing results, the coders agreed 87.5% of the time that an ad mentioned

work experience (Cohen's kappa = 0.70, signifying good reliability) and 78.7% of the time that an ad mentioned political experience (Cohen's kappa = 0.58, signifying fair reliability). The coders then reviewed the ads on which they disagreed and made a joint, final coding decision. Section A in the online appendix provides further details about the coding process, including a codebook, examples of coded ads, and results from the initial round of coding.

Overall, candidate mentions of experience were common but not omnipresent. Most ads (54.66%) mentioned either the candidate's political or work experience. However, it was more common for ads to mention political (37.48%) than work (24.17%) experience. Few ads (only 6.99%) mentioned both political and work experience. Candidates messaged their experience quite consistently across their own ads. The average within-candidate standard deviation for *Political Experience* is about 0.28, and about 0.29 for *Work Experience*. For context, one would find a similar standard deviation with a binary variable among twelve observations if eleven observations took a value of "0" and one observation took a value of "1."

We coded the primary independent variable, *Woman Sponsor*, based on the gender of the candidate sponsoring the ad. We caution that comparing differences between men and women alone has limitations, as it captures the gender identity of the candidate rather than their gender presentation. Conformity to normative social roles varies widely within genders (Diekman and Eagly 2008; Schneider and Bos 2019). Even within genders, gender presentation may have serious consequences for how voters interpret messages about experience and use those messages to decide their vote choice (see Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018). To our knowledge, none of the candidates sponsoring ads in our data set identified as trans, nonbinary, or otherwise outside the traditional gender binary.

In the following section presenting the results, we conduct two tests of each of the two hypotheses. We first conduct simple difference of means tests to establish a baseline, bivariate relationship between candidate gender and presentation of each type of experience. Then we proceed with more rigorous tests of the hypotheses by estimating multilevel logistic regression models with covariates. Logistic regression is an appropriate choice for our binary dependent variables of interest. Because ads are the unit of analysis and one candidate could sponsor several ads, the multilevel approach helps account for the clustered structure of the data and candidate effects. We nest ads within candidates and calculate robust clustered standard errors. We note that this modelling approach cannot identify causal effects of gender on discussion of experience. Readers should treat the analysis as descriptive in nature.

Confounding factors like the varying length of the ads, the partisanship of the candidates, and the districts in which they choose to run might also help to explain differences in candidate messaging. To account for potential confounding variables, we add controls for candidate characteristics (incumbency status, prior officeholding experience, party affiliation, race/ethnicity, and campaign contributions received), ad characteristics (ad length, tone, and estimated cost), and the type of election the ad was prepared for (general, primary, or special/runoff election).[viii] Table B1 in the online appendix displays descriptive statistics for all variables in the models.

We evaluate each hypothesis using different subsets of the data set. To evaluate the first hypothesis, we must reduce the sample only to candidates with experience in elected office who could be considered "at risk" of mentioning it. No comprehensive source lists the prior elected experience of state legislative candidates. Through an online search of candidates' webpages, state legislators' official websites, local media reports, and election information sites (e.g.

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Ballotpedia), a research assistant recorded the actual officeholding background of each of the ad sponsors in our data set. Examining the messaging only in the 614 ads sponsored by candidates who had held elected office before running for state legislature, 384 (62.54%) alluded to the sponsor's political experience.[ix] We assume all candidates have held some prior work experience and so use the full sample of ads to evaluate the second hypothesis.

Political Experience

We begin by evaluating the first hypothesis that men are more likely to mention prior political experience in ads than women. We take a first step by conducting a bivariate analysis of the frequency of experience mentions by candidate gender. Figure 1 displays the results. Among ads from prior officeholders, a statistically significant gender difference appears—66.81% of ads from politically experienced men mention that experience compared to 48.61% ads from politically experienced women.[x] The bivariate results lend tentative support to our expectations.

We proceed with a more rigorous test of the first hypothesis. We specify a multilevel logistic regression model with covariates as described in the previous section. Supporting evidence would be present if we find a negative, statistically significant coefficient for the independent variable of interest, *Woman Sponsor*. We present the full table of regression results in the first column of Table A2 in the online appendix. In line with the descriptive findings in Figure 1, we continue find that male-sponsored ads are more likely to discuss political experience than female-sponsored ads among experienced candidates. The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level of confidence.

**Figure 1: Ads Mentioning Political Experience by Candidate Gender**
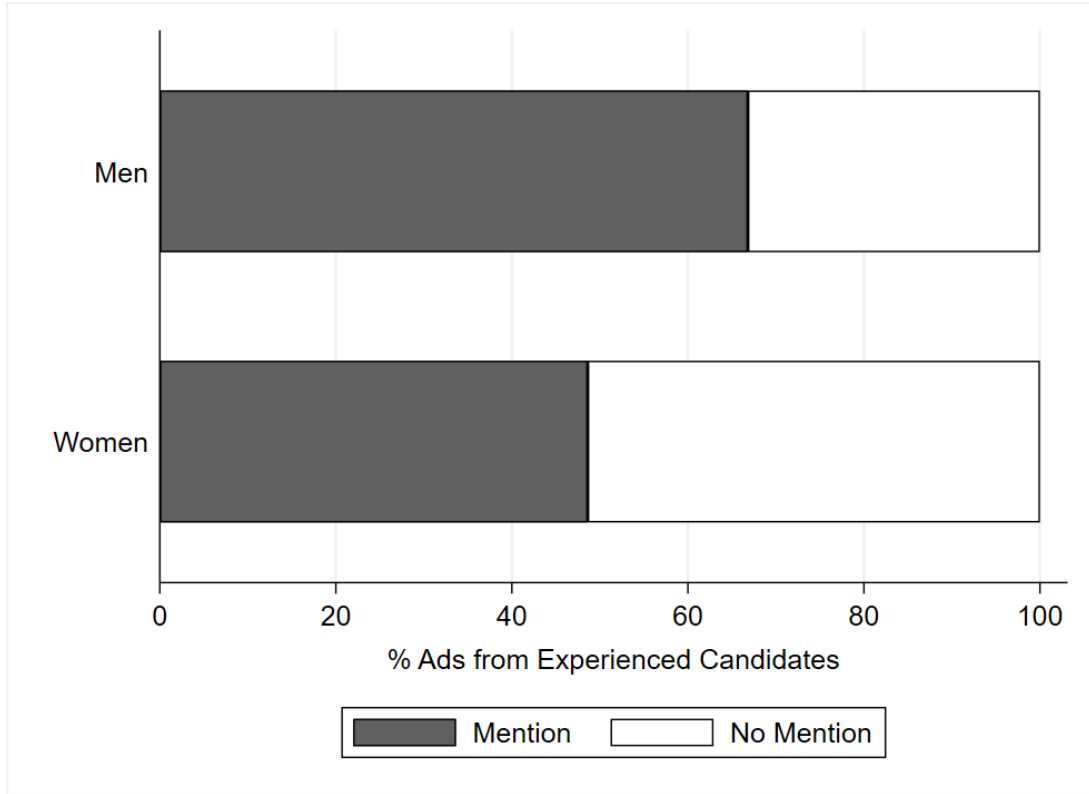
Note: Data from the Wesleyan Media Project and the authors.

Because it is difficult to interpret the size of a relationship from coefficients in a multilevel logistic regression alone, we illustrate the results in Figure 2 by plotting the predicted probabilities derived from the fully specified model in Table B2 in the appendix following the observed value approach (see Hanmer and Kalkan 2013). Among men-sponsored ads, the probability of mentioning experience is 0.66, while for women-sponsored ads it is 0.54. The size of the difference is meaningful—it translates to about one more ad discussing experience out of every eight.

Turning to the controls, listed in the first column of Table A2 in the online appendix, we see few meaningful relationships between them and the outcome variable. The results indicate

Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Mentioning Political Experience by Candidate Gender
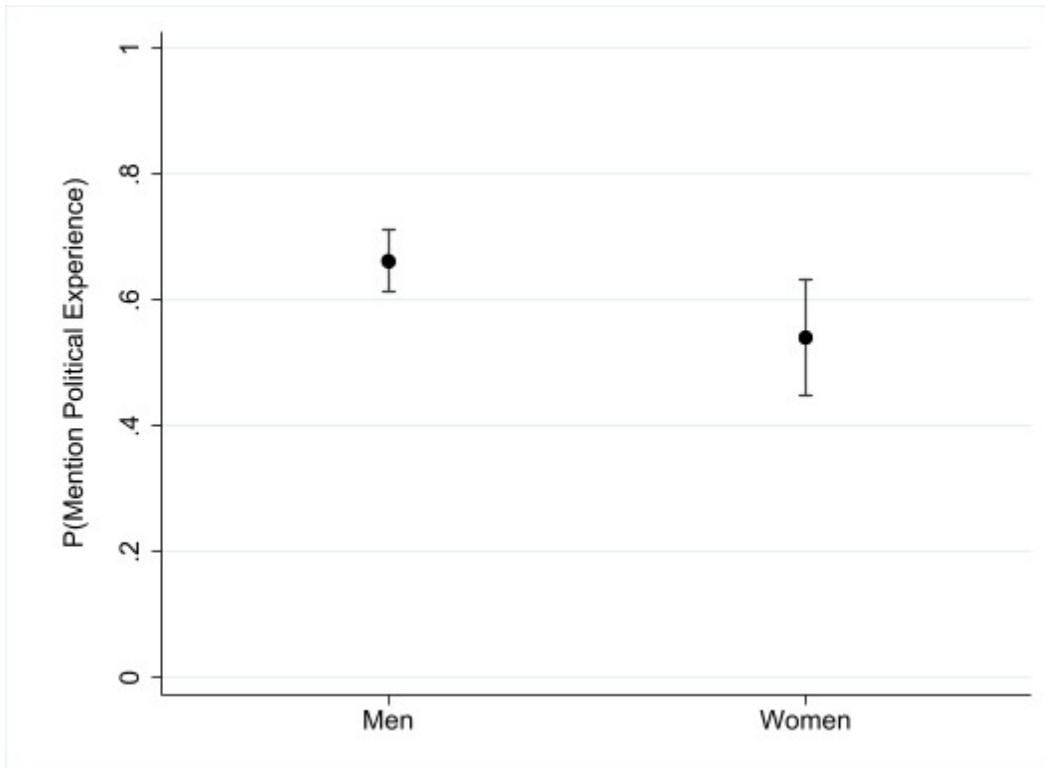
Notes: Data from the Wesleyan Media Project and the authors.

incumbents are significantly more likely to discuss experience than experienced challengers. We

also find that promotional ads discuss the sponsor's political experience more than attack ads.

Finally, we see that ads are significantly less likely to mention political experience in when run

during special or runoff elections than when run during general elections. However, we do not

see evidence that a candidate's party, race, or fundraising level is associated with mentions of

experience, nor do we see evidence that the length, cost, or volume of ads is associated with it

either. Overall, results of these test provide empirical support for the first hypothesis.
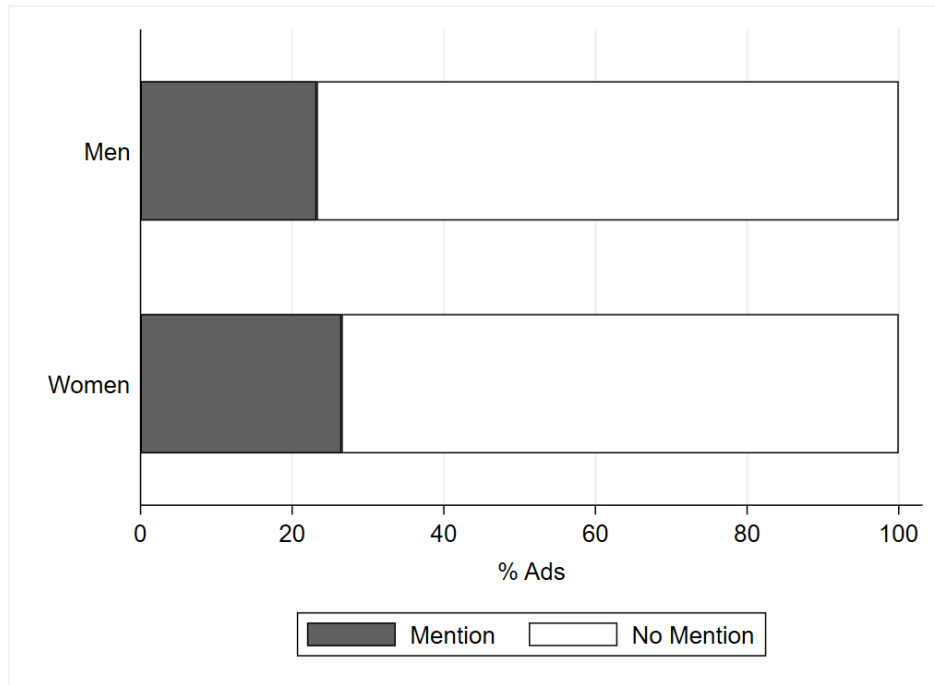
Work Experience

Next we turn to evaluating the second hypothesis, that ads sponsored by men will be more likely to mention their work than ads sponsored by women. As before, we begin by observing the raw differences in mentions of work experience between ads sponsored by men and those sponsored by women. Figure 3 displays the findings. We see that women-sponsored ads are slightly more likely than men-sponsored ads to mention the candidate's prior work experience (26.51% vs. 23.22% respectively). However, the difference is small—3.29 percentage points—and not statistically distinct from zero.

We proceed with a more formal test of the second hypothesis by again specifying a multilevel logistic regression model with full controls. We add the control variable for *Prior Experience* to this model, omitted from the prior model because the sample was limited to ads from politically experienced candidates. Evidence supporting the second hypothesis would be present if we find a negative, statistically significant coefficient for the independent variable of interest, *Woman Sponsor*. The second column in Table B2 in the online appendix presents the full regression results. Contrary to expectations, but consistent with the descriptive findings in Figure 3, we find no differences in discussion of work experience between men-sponsored ads and women-sponsored ads.

Figure 4 illustrates the finding. It shows the predicted probability that an ad mentions the candidate's work experience by the sponsoring candidate's gender, holding controls at observed values in the data. The predicted probabilities fall very close to the proportions illustrated in Figure 3. Ads sponsored by male candidates have a 0.26 likelihood of mentioning work experience, while ads sponsored by female candidates have a 0.23 likelihood. The difference is not statistically significant. Therefore, we fail to find support for the second hypothesis.

Figure 3: Ads Mentioning Work Experience by Candidate Gender

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

Among the controls listed in the second column in Table B2 in the online appendix, we find that promotional ads are significantly more likely to mention candidates' work experience. White candidates are significantly more likely to mention their work experience than nonwhite candidates, perhaps reflecting a difference in messaging strategies from candidates of color. Incumbents and prior officeholders are significantly less likely to mention their work experience, in line with the idea that politically experienced candidates advertise their backgrounds in public office instead of their prior careers.[xi] We find no statistically significant relationship between the dependent variable and any of the other controls.

Figure 4: Predicted Probability of Mentioning Work Experience by Candidate Gender
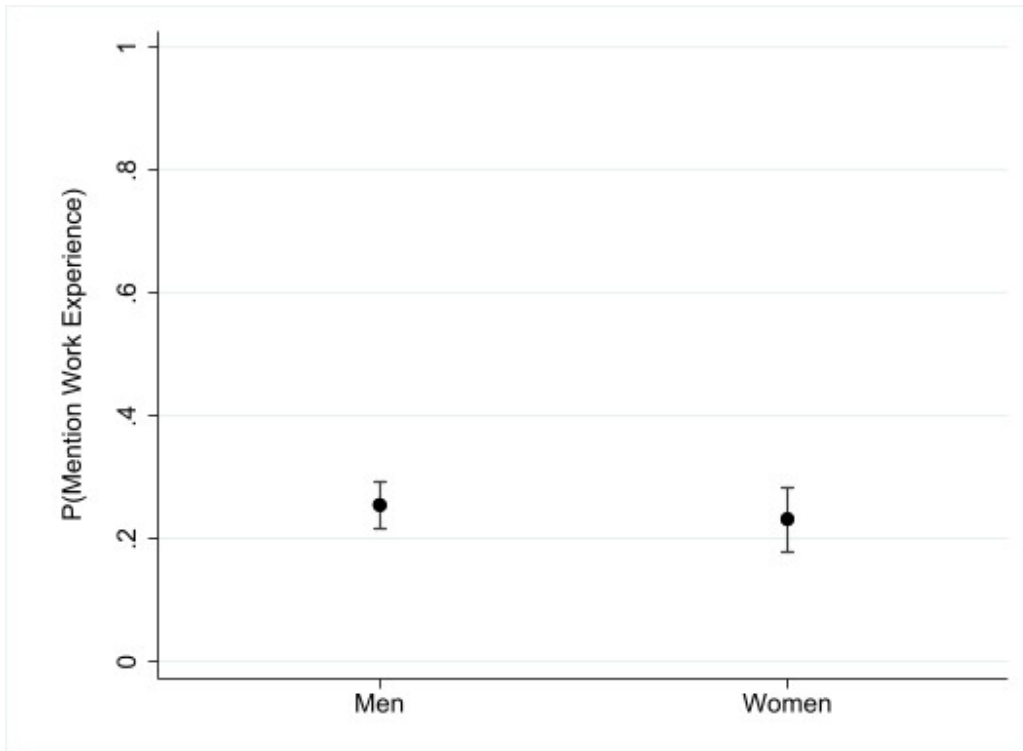
Notes: Data from the Wesleyan Media Project and the authors. The figure shows the predicted probability of a mention of political experience with controls held at observed values.

The results with regards to work experience may differ depending on whether candidates hold prior political experience or not. The descriptive results above show that most politically experienced candidates choose to mention that experience in TV ads, but most candidates do not mention their work experience. Such results suggest that the choice to mention work experience may be conditional on whether the candidate has prior political experience. Politically experienced candidates choose to evoke that background; inexperienced candidates may opt to evoke work experience as a second-best option.

Table B3 in the online appendix shows the results when a mention of work experience is regressed on the sponsoring candidate's gender and the full set of controls, but with results broken out among politically experienced and inexperienced candidates. In both cases, ads

sponsored by women are estimated to be less likely to mention work experience than ads sponsored by men. However, the coefficient estimates are not significantly different from zero in either case. Therefore, we continue to infer that there are no meaningful differences between ads sponsored by men and women in terms of mentioning work experience among either politically experienced or inexperienced candidates.

Supplementary Analyses

In this section, we summarize a series of supplementary analyses exploring additional possibilities in the data. First, we consider whether Democratic and Republican women candidates messaged differently in their ads. We present expectations for the analysis and the findings in Section C of the online appendix. Overall, we find few differences between the two parties. Women's ads appear less likely to mention political experience than men's ads within both parties. The difference is more pronounced among Democrats than among Republicans, but Republican women's ads are not significantly more likely to mention political experience than Democratic women's ads. We continue to find no notable partisan or gender differences for ad mentions of work experience.

Second, we consider whether candidates message their experience when their opponents do so as well. Section D in the online appendix provides details and results. Here too we find little noteworthy. Analyzing only general election ads, we find that ads are no more or less likely to mention a candidate's political experience when at least one of their opponent's ads mentions the opponent's political experience. The same finding applies to mentions of candidate's work experience.

Finally, we consider whether women with high levels of actual political experience undersell their qualifications relative to men with less actual political experience. It is difficult to measure actual experience on a single scale given the wide variety of candidates' backgrounds. However, we can compare incumbents to nonincumbent prior officeholders. While not universally true, incumbents usually have more experience in the offices they currently hold than challengers do. Section E in the online appendix provides the findings. We find that gender differences persist for both groups. Women's ads discuss the candidate's political experience less than men's ads among both incumbents and nonincumbents. However, incumbent women's ads emphasize experience at a higher rate than nonincumbent men's ads, suggesting that the actual level of experience is related to a candidate's likelihood of advertising their experience despite gender differences.

Discussion

Gender appears to be related to the likelihood that candidates advertise their prior political experience in TV ads. Among ads sponsored by prior officeholders, men's ads were more likely to discuss their sponsors' political experience than women's even after controlling for potential confounders like the incumbency status of the candidate and the type of election. Interestingly, neither the party of the sponsoring candidate nor the messaging strategy of the candidate's opponent appears related to the choice to emphasize political experience. At the same time, we find no evidence that women are more or less likely to talk about their work experience than men in televised campaign ads.

The results add a wrinkle to the field's understanding of gender and self-presentation of experience. This study contributes to the literature by assessing gender differences in self-

presentation of experience in a novel medium (TV ads rather than websites) and at a different level of office (state rather than national) than prior studies. The most direct prior evidence on communicating experience comes from Bauer (2020), who finds that U.S. Senate candidates of both genders are equally likely to discuss their political experience on campaign websites, but that women are more likely to highlight their professional experience. Likewise, McDonald, Porter and Treul (2020) find that, among Democrats, experienced women are no more likely than experienced men to highlight their experience on congressional campaign websites. However, websites allow for more expansive communication about a candidate than thirty-second ads and often mimic one another in terms of the types of content provided. The results from the current study suggest that, in campaign communications where time constraints force candidates to consider tradeoffs in which traits and topics they think it most important to convey to a mass audience, women candidates may be more likely to sacrifice discussion of their experience than men.

This study also contributes to our broader understanding of experience beyond that in elected office—how candidates explain their work histories to voters. While a growing body of research, including the present study, examine messaging in order to illuminate how voters evaluate women's qualifications for office, few studies have examined media coverage and campaign messaging of candidates' occupational backgrounds for its own sake (see Carnes 2023; McDermott 1999). Future research in this area would help us understand the messages voters are receiving about who is qualified to run for office based on their work backgrounds.

The analysis holds several limitations. The evidence is purely descriptive; we do not claim causality with any analysis above. We focus solely on the choice to mention prior experience. As a result, the analysis does not explore the context or tone with which that

experience is mentioned. We also treat all work and political experience as equal. Future research may distinguish between types of work experience (e.g., "pipeline professions" like law vs. other types of work) or types of 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 funding. Candidates with the money to air TV ads might disproportionately hold prior political experience and differ qualitatively from poorly funded candidates. Likewise, it is unclear that the results here would generalize to campaign ads for higher-level offices, where we might expect candidates to have even greater qualifications and campaign resources at their disposal. While we claim that the medium might help explain differences between our results and prior findings (Bauer 2020; M. McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2020), we cannot rule out that differences in campaigns across levels of government (or some other reason entirely) explain our divergent findings instead.

Though we posit gender norms surrounding agency and power-seeking goals as a theoretical explanation, the precise mechanism remains murky from an analysis of TV ads alone. The results from this specific analysis of 2018 campaign ads could be a short-term reaction to recent political events; the period of observation occurred immediately after Hillary Clinton's failed presidential campaign, which strongly emphasized her experience. However, critics hounded Clinton with allegations of unseemly ambition and power-seeking behavior. Women candidates in 2018 may have worked to avoid a replay of Clinton's campaign in a way that women candidates more distant from the 2016 presidential election will not.

Nonetheless, the results suggest that women candidates face a double bind. Women are more likely than men to wait to run until they gain lower-level elected experience before running and are more cautious about running for higher office once elected (Brown et al. 2019; Ondercin 2022; Pearson and McGhee 2013). Yet at the same time, women candidates appear less likely than men to make that political experience a salient part of their campaign on the airwaves, perhaps in expectation of voter backlash. This pattern suggests that women candidates feel constrained in capitalizing politically on their hard-won experience. They may also need to expend additional effort and resources in campaigns to fine-tune messaging that portrays them as competent without running afoul of gendered expectations.

The implications of the findings for electoral outcomes are unclear. On one hand, experimental evidence suggests that a greater emphasis on experience in messaging would help voters to see women candidates as more competent, perhaps increasing their electoral support (Bauer 2020; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2017). On the other hand, in polarized times, increasing messaging around experience may do little to change electoral outcomes for women who have already chosen to run.

However, the findings do have important implications for discourse surrounding political candidacy. Elite messaging choices shape the way that ordinary citizens understand politics. When politicians frame messages to appeal to some audiences, it denies other audiences the opportunity to influence how their fellow citizens understand politics (Pottle 2023). In the context of race, for instance, candidate distancing from racial minorities helps maintain inattention to their political needs (Stephens-Dougan 2020). If women candidates decline to emphasize their experience, particularly in media like TV ads that reach voters who are less tuned into politics, voters have little encouragement to update preconceived notions about who is

fit to serve in office. A gender imbalance in how candidates discuss their experience publicly

helps preserve voters' and political insiders' perceptions of who makes a viable candidate, which

itself has implications for the overall representation of women in office.

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Notes

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[i] While there are many reasons a candidate might decline to mention experience, one possible reason is so that a challenger can take on the mantle of an outsider, a rhetorical device that resonates strongly with voters in contemporary U.S. politics. In this case, highlighting Davis' tenure in the statehouse would have muddled her claim elsewhere in the same ad that she was "sick of the old Harrisburg politics."

[ii] The data were obtained from the Wesleyan Media Project, a collaboration between Wesleyan University, Bowdoin College, and Washington State University, and includes media tracking data from Kantar/Campaign Media Analysis Group in Washington, D.C. The Wesleyan Media Project was sponsored in 2018 by a grant from The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Wesleyan Media Project, Knight Foundation, or any of its affiliates.

[iii] Partially complementing these theories, expectancy violations theory holds that individuals evoke extreme reactions when they engage in behaviors that do not fit stereotypes of their groups (Bettencourt et al. 1997; Burgoon 2015; Jussim, Coleman, and Lerch 1987). Applied to politics, women candidates might incur penalties from voters for participating in political leadership, a stereotypically masculine activity (Cassese and Holman 2018). However, expectancy violations theory may also lead to a prediction that voters regard women more positively for violating gender norms. Closeness to or warmness toward the target before the norm violation occurs will predict whether the reaction will be positive or negative (Burgoon 2015).

[iv] More generally, researchers have arrived to mixed results on whether communicating experience improves candidates' odds of victories irrespective of gender (Fridkin and Kenney 2011; Hansen and Treul 2021; Kirkland and Coppock 2018). Even though prior political experience is a strong predictor of a higher vote share, experience advantages more likely stem from these candidates' advantages in campaigning, such as superior fundraising ability and strategic selection into winnable races (Bonica 2020; Jacobson 1989; Maestas and Rugeley 2008) than from an explicit voter preference for experience.

[v] 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 10/25/23 at https://www.followthemoney.org/research/institute-reports/joint-report-reveals-record-donations-in-2020-state-and-federal-races.

[vi] This choice allows us to compare the distinct messages the candidates send to voters through ads but could bias the analysis if candidates run ads with different frequencies. For example, if a candidate sponsors one ad emphasizing their position on abortion and a second ad emphasizing

their prior experience, the ads would be equally weighted in our data set even if the abortion ad appears ten times on television and the experience appears 200 times. However, we later estimate models weighting for the frequency of ad appearances and reach the same set of conclusions.

[vii] 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.

[viii] *Prior Office* is a binary variable with a value of 1 indicating the candidate is an incumbent or held any prior elected office (e.g., mayor). *Incumbent* is a binary variable with a value of 1 indicating ads sponsored by incumbents and 0 indicating ads sponsored by challengers. *Democrat* is a binary variable with a value of 1 indicating Democratic affiliation and 0 indicating any other party. *White* is a binary variable with a value of 1 indicating that the candidate identifies as white and 0 indicating any other race/ethnicity. (Because 87% of the ads in the data were sponsored by white candidates, a small sample size precludes using a richer set of measures of candidate race/ethnicity.) Data come from Shah et al. (2022). *Campaign Contributions* are measured in $100,000 and gathered from the Follow the Money (previously the National Institute of Money in State Politics.) The remaining variables come from the Wesleyan Media Project. *Ad Length* is measured in seconds. *Promotional Ad* is a binary variable taking a value of 1 if the ad promotes a positive image of the sponsoring candidate and 0 if the ad attacks the sponsor's opponent or contrasts the two candidates. *Estimated Ad Cost* is measured in $1000. *Primary* and *Special/Runoff* are binary variables taking a value of 1 if the ad appeared as part of a campaign in each type of election, with general election ads serving as the reference category of 0.

[ix] Two ads were coded as referring to the sponsor's political experience when the candidate had never held elected office. These ads were sponsored by a longtime state legislative aide and an appointed city administrator (both men), candidates who could reasonably make claims about their experience in a political arena without having been elected to office.

[x] A corollary of our first hypothesis is that men highlight their inexperience more than women. We conducted a second round of coding among the ads that did not mention political experience to identify the ads in which candidates affirmatively said they lacked prior experience in elected office. However, we identified only one ad where this occurred—a Missouri State Senate candidate said, "I've never run for office." We interpret this finding to mean that, while women candidates might expect self-promotion of their qualifications to cause a backlash, candidates of both genders avoid self-effacing statements about their qualifications.

[xi] An ad was more likely to substitute a mention of its sponsor's work experience if the candidate lacked political experience. For candidates with no political experience, 149 ads (35.82%) mentioned the sponsor's work experience, compared with 100 similar ads (16.29%) from politically experienced candidates.

ONLINE APPENDIX FOR

"Job Talk: Candidate Gender and Presentation of Prior Experience in Television Ads in the US"
Politics & Gender

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Section A: Coding for Experience

Two coders watched the political ads in their original video format. They were asked to decide whether each ad mentioned the sponsor's *Political Experience* (1 = yes, 0 = no) and *Work Experience* (1 = yes, 0 = no).

Subsection A.1: Political Experience

For *Political Experience*, the overarching question coders asked themselves was, did the ad provide information that allows me to deduce the candidate is a current or former elected officeholder? Coders looked for any ad that either explicitly stated or logically implied elected political experience. The ad could imply experience even if it was conveyed through text on the screen, rather than a speaker in the ad conveying the information. The following examples illustrate, but do not exhaust, the possibilities that coders could look for:

- The ad names an office that the candidate currently holds (e.g. "As your State Senator…")
- The ad refers to a candidate's prior experience in an elected position (e.g. "When [candidate] served on the _____ City Council…")
- The ad refers to an action that a candidate could only have taken as an elected official (e.g. "[candidate] voted to lower taxes" or "I sponsored a bill that would…")
- The ad states that the candidate is running for reelection

Coders were also instructed not to include ads that explicitly stated or logically implied that candidates had taken part in some political activity if the activity could be completed outside of elected office. Some negative examples of ads *not* coded as indicating political experience are:

- The ad states that the candidate has taken some vague action on a political issue and that action could be taken as either an elected official or a private citizen (e.g. "I've fought for the rights of unborn children.")
- The ad states that the candidate worked in an unelected position in government.

In Table A1, we provide several examples of ads in the data set to illustrate to readers how coders approached their task.

Table A1: Examples of Ads Coded for Political Experience

Candidate	Quote/Text from Ad	Value for *Political Experience*	Reasoning
Johnny Ford (Alabama House)	"Hello 82nd District, this is Mayor Johnny Ford, former mayor of Tuskegee, Alabama and Alabama State Representative."	1	Explicit statement of elected office.
Larry Moliterno (Ohio House)	"Larry was kind of the, uh, creator of our business plan in how we run Boardman Township and I'm proud to say Boardman Township's run pretty good the last eight years." [On-screen text identifies speaker as Brad Calhoun, Boardman Township Trustee]	1	Statement implies that candidate served alongside the speaker as a Boardman Township Trustee, an elected position.
Joyce Krawiec (North Carolina Senate)	"Joyce Krawiec cut taxes to help families and small businesses keep more of their hard-earned money."	1	Statement implies that candidate made a policy choice that only an elected official could make.
Melissa Hurtado (California Senate)	"As a healthcare advocate, Melissa works to help more families get healthcare they can afford."	0	This type of political advocacy does not necessarily imply the candidate is an elected official. Private citizens can work as healthcare advocates. [Note: this candidate is a prior officeholder in reality.]

In Table A2, we present the intercoder reliability for the initial coding of ads. As noted below, one of the two coders did not review about 8% of the ads in the initial round of review.

Table A2: Tabulation of Initial Round of Coding

R2's Assigned Value

R1's Assigned Value / Political Experience	0	1	Total
0	553 (76.17%)	13 (4.09%)	566 (54.21%)
1	121 (16.67%)	269 (84.59%)	390 (37.36%)
Did not review	52 (7.16%)	36 (11.32%)	88 (8.43%)
Total	726 (100%)	318 (100%)	1044 (100%)

Agreement between coders was 78.7%, yielding a Cohen's kappa of 0.58. This indicates fair reliability. The coders jointly reviewed all ads on which they disagreed and made a final coding decision. All ads left uncoded in the initial round were reviewed by both coders in the final round of coding.

Subsection A.2: Work Experience

For *Work Experience*, coders were instructed to enter a 1 if the ad disclosed the candidate's occupational background and a 0 if it did not. The ad did not need to say a specific job title, but it did need to make clear the type of work that candidate engaged in. The following examples illustrate, but do not exhaust, the possibilities that coders could look for:

- The ad gives a specific job title to the candidate (e.g. small business owner, welder)
- The ad describes a candidate's place of employment (e.g. a law firm)
- The ad describes a candidate's industry (e.g. healthcare)
- The ad describes the nature of the candidate's work or job in a way that makes the job identifiable

Table A3: Examples of Ads Coded for Work Experience

Candidate	Quote/Text from Ad	Value for *Work Experience*	Reasoning
Jene Huffman-Gilreath (Arkansas House)	"I worked in Washington D.C. for a US Senator and spent many years as the vice president of a regional bank."	1	Explicit statement of candidate's occupation
Randy Keith (Illinois House)	"Randy solves problems. No drama. Worked in a factory for 40 years."	1	Describes candidate's place of employment
Jon Plumer (Wisconsin Assembly)	"I drove a sales route for 30 years, so I know a strong Wisconsin starts with good infrastructure."	1	Describes the nature of the candidate's work in a way that makes the job identifiable
Larry Stutts (Alabama Senate)	"Dr. Larry Stutts" appears in campaign logo on screen	0	Gives candidate's title, but ad gives no other information about the nature of his work.
Laura Ellman (Illinois Senate)	"In my work, I use facts and data to solve problems."	0	Describes the nature of the candidate's work, but the job is not identifiable. (Lots of jobs require workers to use facts and data.)

Coders were instructed not to include jobs that do not pay wages (e.g. volunteer positions or charitable work) and not to include terms that were vague enough as to not necessarily indicate paid work. For example, describing a candidate as an "advocate" for some issue could indicate a paid job, but it could also indicate an interest in an issue that the candidate pursued on a volunteer basis. Table A3 provide several examples of ads in the data set to illustrate the coding further.

Table A4: Tabulation of Initial Round of Coding

R2's Assigned Value

	Work Experience	0	1	Total
	0	682	33	715
		(88%)	(12.27%)	(68.49%)
R1's Assigned Value	1	60	232	292
		(7.74%)	(86.25%)	(27.97%)
	Did not review	33	4	37
		(4.26%)	(1.49%)	(3.54%)
	Total	775	269	1044
		(100%)	(100%)	(100%)

In Table A4, we present the intercoder reliability for the initial coding of ads. As noted below, one of the two coders did not review about 4% of the ads in the initial round of review. Agreement between coders was 87.6%, yielding a Cohen's kappa of 0.70. This indicates good reliability. The coders jointly reviewed all ads on which they disagreed and made a final coding decision. All ads left uncoded in the initial round were reviewed by both coders in the final round of coding.

Section B: Descriptive Statistics and Main Results

Table B1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable Name	Mean	Min	Max	Std. Dev.
Political Experience	0.37	0	1	--
Work Experience	0.24	0	1	--
Woman	0.29	0	1	--
Incumbent	0.41	0	1	--
Prior Office	0.60	0	1	--
Democrat	0.43	0	1	--
White	0.87	0	1	--
Campaign Contributions in $100,000	7.67	0	111.57	11.02
Ad Length (in seconds)	28.90	10	60	5.72
Promotional Ad	0.50	0	1	--
Estimated Ad Cost in $1000	0.40	0	14	0.79
Ad Volume	2.26	1	20	2.14
Type of Election = General	0.66	0	1	--
Type of Election = Primary	0.28	0	1	--
Type of Election = Special	0.06	0	1	--

Table B2: Candidate Gender and Presentation of Experience in TV Ads

VARIABLES	(1) DV: Political Experience	(2) DV: Work Experience
Woman Sponsor	-0.75*	-0.20
	(0.33)	(0.30)
Incumbent	1.44*	-0.83*
	(0.28)	(0.39)
Democrat	0.12	0.23
	(0.33)	(0.30)
White	-0.41	0.99*
	(0.47)	(0.43)
Campaign Contributions in $100,000	-0.02	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Ad Length	0.04	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Promotional Ad	1.22*	1.53*
	(0.27)	(0.30)
Estimated Ad Cost in $1000	-0.09	-0.14
	(0.16)	(0.13)
Ad Volume	-0.05	0.00
	(0.04)	(0.04)
Type of Election = Primary	-0.22	-0.30
	(0.33)	(0.30)
Type of Election = Special or Runoff	-2.31*	-0.87
	(0.66)	(0.57)
Prior Office		-1.07*
		(0.36)
Constant	-1.05	-3.28*
	(0.87)	(0.86)
Observations	613	1,013
Number of groups	294	510
Candidate RE	Yes	Yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p<0.05$

Table B3: Presentation of Work Experience by Candidate's Political Experience

VARIABLES	(1) Politically Experienced	(2) Politically Inexperienced
Woman Sponsor	-0.30	-0.23
	(0.42)	(0.46)
Incumbent	-0.72*	--
	(0.36)	
Democrat	0.06	0.29
	(0.41)	(0.52)
White	0.39	1.57*
	(0.54)	(0.70)
Campaign Contributions in $100,000	-0.01	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.02)
Ad Length	0.03	0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Promotional Ad	1.21*	1.96*
	(0.36)	(0.58)
Estimated Ad Cost in $1000	-0.20	-0.08
	(0.18)	(0.17)
Ad Volume	0.02	-0.03
	(0.05)	(0.10)
Type of Election = Primary	-0.19	-0.51
	(0.37)	(0.58)
Type of Election = Special or Runoff	-0.33	-1.47
	(0.66)	(0.97)
Constant	-3.45*	-3.93*
	(1.21)	(1.25)
Observations	613	400
Number of groups	294	217
Candidate RE	Yes	Yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p<0.05$

Section C: Partisan Differences

In this section, we turn to an exploratory analysis of whether partisan differences might manifest in how ads present their sponsoring candidates' experiences. Candidates from different parties differ systematically in the types of issues and traits they present to voters (Hayes 2005; Petrocik 1996). Voters have come to stereotype the Democratic Party as more associated with female traits and issues and the Republican Party as more associated with male traits and issues (Winter 2010). However, party stereotypes are more salient to voters in the context of a political campaign than gender stereotypes (Hayes 2011). As a result, we might expect women candidates in each party to present their gender differently to appeal to different audiences among voters. Though we control for the party affiliation of ad sponsors above, it may be more appropriate to model mentions of experience separately by the party of sponsoring candidates, given the potential for different data-generating processes driving the results in each party.

First, we compare women's ads and men's ads within each party. In Table C1, we present results from the models in the main results when comparing men and women within each party. Among Democrats, we find that ads from politically experienced women are significantly less likely than ads from comparably experienced men to highlight that experience. Using the coefficient estimates to generate predicted probabilities, we find that an ad sponsored by a politically experienced Democratic man has an 68% chance of mentioning experience, compared to a 49% chance for an ad sponsored by his woman counterpart.[3] Among Republicans, the differences are much smaller and not statistically different. The predicted probability of a

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[3] As before, controls in the multiple regression models are held at observed values to generate the predicted probabilities.

Table C1: Presentation of Experience in by Candidate Party

VARIABLES	Democrats		Republicans	
	Political Experience	Work Experience	Political Experience	Work Experience
Woman Sponsor = 1	-1.27*	0.13	-0.32	-0.60
	(0.57)	(0.45)	(0.41)	(0.45)
Incumbent	1.32*	-1.39	1.50*	-0.66
	(0.50)	(0.72)	(0.35)	(0.46)
White	-0.66	0.08	0.55	2.55*
	(0.64)	(0.61)	(0.77)	(1.00)
Campaign Contributions in $100,000	-0.01	-0.03	-0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Ad Length	0.07	0.06*	0.03	0.00
	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Promotional Ad	1.21*	2.09*	1.23*	1.30*
	(0.47)	(0.66)	(0.33)	(0.33)
Estimated Ad Cost in $1000	-0.44	-0.20	-0.06	-0.07
	(0.68)	(0.22)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Ad Volume	-0.10	0.06	-0.03	-0.03
	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Type of Election = Primary	0.48	-1.56*	-0.48	0.03
	(0.75)	(0.74)	(0.38)	(0.35)
Type of Election = Special or Runoff	-1.86	-1.35	-2.34*	-0.64
	(0.98)	(1.37)	(0.83)	(0.61)
Prior Office		-0.91		-1.11*
		(0.63)		(0.47)
Constant	-1.35	-3.33*	-1.93	-3.71*
	(1.41)	(1.20)	(1.15)	(1.43)
Observations	199	434	408	568
Number of groups	97	222	195	282
Candidate RE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p<0.05$

politically experienced woman candidate in the GOP mentioning her experience is 61%, compared to 66% for her male counterpart. We find no notable differences between men's ads and women's ads in their likelihood of mentioning work experience, either within or across parties.

Table C2: Presentation of Experience Among Women Alone

VARIABLES	(1) DV: Political Experience	(2) DV: Work Experience
Democrat	-0.70	0.92
	(0.69)	(0.69)
Incumbent	1.93*	-1.96*
	(0.79)	(0.98)
White	-1.91*	1.98*
	(0.88)	(0.83)
Campaign Contributions in $100,000	-0.09*	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.02)
Ad Length	0.03	0.06
	(0.04)	(0.04)
Promotional Ad	2.33*	2.64*
	(0.81)	(0.85)
Estimated Ad Cost in $1000	0.28	-0.82*
	(0.22)	(0.41)
Ad Volume	-0.11	0.09
	(0.18)	(0.15)
Type of Election = Primary	-0.99	-1.20
	(0.88)	(0.70)
Type of Election = Special or Runoff	-5.22*	-0.10
	(1.63)	(1.17)
Prior Office		-0.60
		(0.70)
Constant	0.39	-5.97*
	(1.37)	(1.94)
Observations	141	287
Number of groups	71	158
Candidate RE	Yes	Yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* p<0.05

Restricting the models only to ads sponsored by women candidates, we compare the likelihood of mentioning experience between Democrats and Republicans. Table C2 presents full results. We see small differences between women in each party. Republican women's ads are slightly more likely to highlight political experience than Democratic women's ads (among

politically experienced candidates), while Democratic women's ads are slightly more likely to

mention their work experience. However, in both cases the differences are not statistically

significant.

Section D: Competitive Campaign Dynamics

Campaigns do not operate in a vacuum. Oftentimes, candidate messaging strategy responds dynamically to issues and traits evoked by an opponent (Porter, Treul, and McDonald 2024; Windett 2014). We investigate whether candidates' presentation of experience corresponds with their opponents' presentation of experience. We have conflicting expectations. On one hand, candidates may compete to establish who has more experience. On the other hand, candidates may stake out opposing messages on experience to contrast with one another and offer voters a choice.

Unfortunately, poor data availability constrains our ability to answer this question decisively. We limit our observations to general election ads; unlike multicandidate primary elections, dyadic general election contests clarify which opponent might be influencing a candidate's messaging choices. We identify dyads of general election opponents using data from Ballotpedia since WMP does not identify state legislative candidates' opponents. We create the variable *Opponent Political Experience*, which takes a value of 1 if the candidate's opponent releases at least one ad mentioning their political experience and a 0 otherwise. We also create the variable *Opponent Work Experience*, which takes a value of 1 if the candidate's opponent releases at least ad mentioning their work experience and a 0 otherwise.

We encounter a high rate of missing data. We cannot code these two variables on 44% of general election ads because there are no opponents' ads to observe, whether because the campaign is uncontested or because the opponent ran no TV ads. Moreover, we caution readers that contests in which both candidates run ads are disproportionately competitive elections in larger states where both candidates can raise sufficient money to run TV ads. It's unclear

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whether lessons learned from this narrow group of candidates will offer broader lessons for how all candidates message their experience.

These caveats notwithstanding, we proceed to the analysis in Table D1. We find no strong evidence that candidates' messaging choices on experience are related to their opponents' messaging. In column 1 of Table D1, we see that ads are less likely to mention a candidate's political experience if one of their opponents' ads mentions political experience. Those ads are more likely to mention political experience if an opponents' ads mention work experience. However, we cannot eliminate the null hypothesis that the experience messaging in opposing candidates' ads is unrelated to one another. In column 2 of Table D1, we see that ads are more likely to mention a candidate's work experience in cases where opponents discuss either political experience or work experience, but again coefficient estimates for the relevant variables are not statistically significant at conventional levels of confidence.

Table D1: Presentation of Experience and Opponent's Presentation of Experience

VARIABLES	(1) DV: Political Experience	(2) DV: Work Experience
Opponent Political Experience	-0.18	0.71
	(0.35)	(0.47)
Opponent Work Experience	0.71	0.63
	(0.39)	(0.43)
Woman Sponsor	-1.28*	0.48
	(0.50)	(0.47)
Incumbent	1.88*	0.74
	(0.39)	(0.79)
Democrat	-0.33	0.76
	(0.41)	(0.54)
White	-3.38*	0.08
	(0.70)	(0.81)
Campaign Contributions in $100,000	-0.09*	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Ad Length	-0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.03)
Promotional Ad	0.80*	1.79*
	(0.31)	(0.50)
Estimated Ad Cost in $1000	0.09	-0.04
	(0.37)	(0.30)
Ad Volume	-0.00	0.00
	(0.03)	(0.05)
Prior Office		-1.68*
		(0.81)
Constant	3.43*	-3.21*
	(1.22)	(1.26)
Observations	231	376
Number of groups	88	152
Candidate RE	Yes	Yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$

Section E: Distinguishing Levels of Political Experience

The main results suggest that ads produced by women candidates are less likely to emphasize political experience than ads produced by men. A related question arising from this finding might be, do the best-qualified women candidates emphasize their experience less than the least-qualified men? The main analysis of political experience in Figure 2 and Table B2 only observes ads produced by prior officeholders because candidates without prior experience in office generally do not advertise their political experience. Only two ads sponsored by candidates who had never held prior office discussed the candidates' political experience. Both candidates had worked professionally in politics for years without being elected. Notably, both candidates were men. However, it's difficult to draw broad conclusions about gender differences in candidate behavior from two data points.

We can take a step further by trying to compare very experienced and lightly experienced candidates among prior officeholders. Unfortunately, it would be quite subjective to try to measure *how much* experience candidates have on a single scale, given the wide variety of backgrounds that candidates bring with them. However, we can move in the direction of answering the question by comparing incumbents to nonincumbent prior officeholders. While this strategy will not perfectly capture the distinction between high- and low-experienced candidates, we might reasonably expect an incumbent to have more experience in a position they currently hold than a challenger does.

To answer the question, we replicate and extend the main model from column 1 in Table B2 by adding an interaction term between the *Woman Sponsor* and *Incumbent* variables. If better-qualified women emphasized their experience less, we would expect to see a negatively signed and statistically significant coefficient estimate on the interaction term.

**Table E1: Do Incumbent Women Emphasize Experience Less?**

VARIABLES	DV: Political Experience
Woman Sponsor	-0.63
	(0.50)
Incumbent	1.49*
	(0.32)
Woman Sponsor X Incumbent	-0.20
	(0.64)
Democrat	0.12
	(0.33)
White	-0.41
	(0.47)
Campaign Contributions in $100,000	-0.02
	(0.01)
Ad Length	0.04
	(0.02)
Promotional Ad	1.22*
	(0.27)
Estimated Ad Cost in $1000	-0.09
	(0.15)
Ad Volume	-0.05
	(0.04)
Type of Election = Primary	-0.22
	(0.33)
Type of Election = Special or Runoff	-2.30*
	(0.66)
Constant	-1.11
	(0.87)
Observations	613
Number of groups	294
Candidate RE	Yes

Robust standard errors in parentheses
* $p<0.05$

We present regression results in Table E1. While the coefficient estimate for the interaction term is signed in the expected negative direction, it is not statistically different from zero. Because interaction terms can be difficult to interpret on their own, we present in Figure E1 the predicted probabilities of ads mentioning political experience based on the gender and

Figure E1: Predicted Probability of Mentioning Political Experience by Candidate Gender and Incumbency
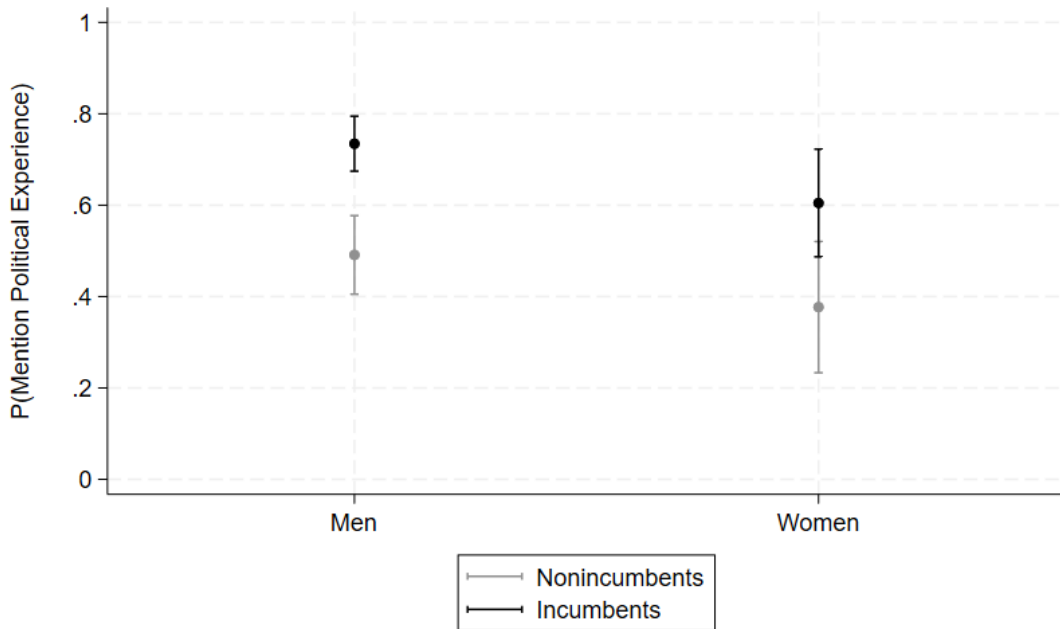
incumbency status of candidates with controls held at observed values in the data. Regardless of incumbency status, men's ads tend to emphasize their experience more than ads with comparable levels of experience. Incumbent men's ads are predicted to mention experience at a likelihood of 0.74, compared to a likelihood of 0.61 for women's ads (difference=0.13). Nonincumbent men's ads are predicted to mention experience at a likelihood of 0.49, compared to a likelihood of 0.38 for nonincumbent women's ads (difference=0.11). The gender differences across incumbency statuses are not statistically different from one another. Therefore, we find that women seem to undersell their experience relative to men at all levels of actual experience. Yet, there also seem to be limits on men. While men emphasize experience more within all levels of experience, women incumbents' ads are more likely to evoke experience than nonincumbent men's ads.

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