

Western Kentucky University

**TopSCHOLAR®**

---

Mahurin Honors College Capstone Experience/  
Thesis Projects

Mahurin Honors College

---

2021

## **Democratic Disenfranchisement: Analyzing the Factors that Contribute to or Hinder the Ability of Marginalized Groups to Run for Public Office in Kentucky**

Isaac Keller

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu\\_hon\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses)



Part of the [Other Political Science Commons](#), and the [Public Administration Commons](#)

---

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mahurin Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact [topscholar@wku.edu](mailto:topscholar@wku.edu).

DEMOCRATIC DISENFRANCHISEMENT: ANALYZING THE FACTORS THAT  
CONTRIBUTE TO OR HINDER THE ABILITY OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS TO  
RUN FOR PUBLIC OFFICE IN KENTUCKY

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts  
with Mahurin Honors College Graduate Distinction  
at Western Kentucky University

By

Isaac K. Keller

May 2021

\*\*\*\*\*

CE/T Committee:

Dr. Saundra Ardrey, Chair

Dr. Scott Lasley

Dr. Melinda Grimsley

Copyright by  
Isaac Keller  
2021

## ABSTRACT

Much has been written about barriers that lead to unequal representation, focusing largely on situational characteristics of the individual voter (socioeconomic status, efficacy, socialization, etc.) and on structural (institutional) obstacles to voter turnout and participation. However, political participation is inclusive of more than just voting. This research seeks to identify and analyze the factors that contribute to or hinder the ability of marginalized candidates to run for public office. To explore whether or not marginalized candidates face unique obstacles when running for public office, a qualitative approach with one-on-one interviews between a convenience sampling in Kentucky of ten political candidates was utilized. According to previous literature and similar to the findings of this paper, marginalized groups experience unique obstacles when running for public office; specifically contextual, structural, and psychological factors. In addition, variables preventing equal representation and damaging the “electability” of marginalized candidates were largely variables that exclusively affected marginalized candidates. This research has implications for raising awareness of the obstacles these marginalized candidates face, specifically providing analysis in the state of Kentucky that may provide a foundation for a broader analysis of discrimination in southern states. Building upon previous research findings, this paper challenges our government and society to implement strategies and affirmative actions to equalize the playing field in electoral politics for marginalized candidates and communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my special thanks of gratitude and acknowledgement to my academic mentor and project supervisor, Dr. Sandra Ardrey, whose expertise was invaluable throughout the entirety of the project. Your teachings and leadership inspired me to pursue the course that I have, and pushed my academic and political contributions to a higher level. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Scott Lasley for your collaboration and patient support. I want to thank you for the countless letters of recommendation, your valuable academic feedback and for being a part of this CE/T project.

I would also like to thank my debate coach, Chad Meadows, for your unconditional support and wise counsel. Because of you, my undergraduate career was full of stimulating academic conversations, winning arguments, and building a family here at Western Kentucky University. From defending me against political attacks, to getting me to college, you provided me the tools I needed to be successful and reassured me that I always have someone in my corner.

In addition, I would like to extend my personal acknowledgements to my mom, Nicole Keller, for getting me where I am today. You are my role model and hero, and I credit you for ingraining in me discipline, perseverance, and the desire to always do better. Thank you mom, for everything.

## VITA

### *EDUCATION*

- Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY May 2021  
B.A. in Political Science and Corporate & Organizational  
Communication - Mahurin Honors College Graduate  
Certificate in Political Communication  
Honors CE/T: *Democratic Disenfranchisement: Analyzing the Factors that  
Contribute to or Hinder the Ability of Marginalized Groups to Run for Public  
Office in Kentucky*
- Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey Fall 2018  
*Kentucky-Princeton Summer Institute on Inequality and Political  
Theory Graduate*
- Aberystwyth University, Wales, United Kingdom July 2018  
*U.S.-U.K. Fulbright Summer Institute Participant on Culture Hood  
and National Identity*
- University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri Summer 2016  
& 2017  
*Introductory courses on political science and criminology*
- Liberty North High School, Liberty, Missouri May 2017
- ### *PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE*
- Synergy Services Inc. in Kansas City, Missouri August 2017 -  
August 2019  
*Periodic Intern and Data Analyst*
- United States Senate Office in Bowling Green, Kentucky Spring 2018  
*Office Intern*
- Ridge High School in Basking Ridge, New Jersey August 2018 -  
Present  
*Congressional Debate Coach*
- Dana Beasley Brown's campaign in Bowling Green, Kentucky June 2020 -  
November 2020  
*Campaign Manager for City Commissioner*

## CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Vita.....	iv
Rationale .....	1
Literature Review.....	5
Research .....	15
Analysis.....	19
Conclusion & Recommendations .....	32
References.....	36
Appendix A: Recruiting Email .....	41
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	42

## RATIONALE

The 117th Congress is the most demographically diverse in United States history (Sharma, 2021). In fact, the most recent poll released suggests that twenty-seven percent of the United States legislative branch is made up of women, a fifty percent increase from the 112th Congress just a decade ago (Elizabeth Blazina & Desilver, 2021). Similar statistics exist for the growth in racial and ethnic diversity as well. Clearly, the descriptive representation of some marginalized groups in politics has grown in the last few decades. This progress shouldn't be understated or undervalued. However, women make up over fifty-two percent of the United States population, and it should then be alarming that women only represent twenty-seven percent of Congress. Similarly, this is true for all marginalized communities in the United States and true for every level of government. For example, African-Americans make up thirteen percent of the population, and yet make up only nine percent of state legislatures (Wiltz, 2015). Even when proportional to their respective minority population, these communities are severely underrepresented at every level of government.

Much has been written about barriers that lead to unequal representation, focusing largely on situational characteristics of the individual voter (socioeconomic status, efficacy, socialization, etc.) and on structural (institutional) obstacles to voter turnout and participation. However, political participation and electoral disenfranchisement should be, and is, inclusive of more than just voting. There is a strong need to extend research goals and terminology to those running for public office as well. This research seeks to



identify and analyze the factors that contribute to or hinder the ability of marginalized candidates to run for public office. In this paper, marginalized candidates refer to members of the working class or below, people of color, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. For the purpose of this paper, electoral disenfranchisement will also refer to the practices that have the effect of preventing a person exercising the right to campaign. Further explanation of these definitions can be found under the research portion of this study.

### **Unintended Consequences of Underrepresentation**

The lack of electoral representation for folks in poverty, for example, sustains political institutions that ignore the needs of the working class and prolong extreme economic inequality. Currently, the working class of America make up fifty-two percent of the population, yet makes up two percent of Congress, three percent of state legislators, and ten percent of city council members (Carnes, 2018). Competing for public office requires dedicating less time to a job and spending one's own money, a luxury that families in or near poverty do not have. The few individuals who can overcome these obstacles are forced to outcompete with a candidate funded by corporations and other elites, each with their own interests and hoping for a quid pro quo.

Even in high-poverty level districts, where the majority of constituents are below or at the poverty line, issues of poverty are rarely brought to the chamber by their elected officials, and when they are, they aren't engaged meaningfully (Haider & Schweitzer, 2020). Similarly, the overwhelming majority of those elected in these districts still don't mirror the economic demographics of their constituents, often making the issue of poverty a lesser priority for that elected official (Haider & Schweitzer, 2020). Roughly

2.6 million Americans die every year from factors associated with poverty (Rodriguez & Capotescu, 2018). For communities in poverty to begin receiving the quality education, affordable healthcare, and promising jobs they deserve, they need someone who can relate to those tragedies and/or can be sensitive to those issues, understanding the change necessary to save them.

This example should help illustrate the broader rationale for this paper. When marginalized communities are forced to rely on governments that underrepresent their communities, their issues are rarely addressed and often misunderstood by their elected officials. This is true with every marginalized community, necessitating greater and more accurate representation of the marginalized populations within the United States.

Furthermore, a potential cause of this underrepresentation may begin in the process of campaigning and electoral politics. Identifying whether or not there are barriers that hinder the ability of marginalized candidates to run for and win public office is a prerequisite to discovering how to improve the political representation of marginalized communities.

### **Descriptive and Substantive Representation**

Descriptive representation refers to a minority representing another minority with the same identity characteristics in government by their mere presence, whereas substantive representation refers to representing other minorities through policy preferences they advocate and/or vote for (Ford, 2017). As explained above, there are a litany of reasons to encourage greater descriptive and substantive representation at every level of government. These forms of representation exist when marginalized candidates

are elected to office, emphasizing the need to identify reasons marginalized candidates may not run or win.

### **Research Contribution**

This research both raises awareness to the obstacles these marginalized candidates face, as well as contributes to the literature that examines the lack of election accessibility for candidates in marginalized groups. Studying the challenges that underrepresented individuals face when running for office will identify variables preventing equal representation in states like Kentucky, that may provide broader analysis of electoral discrimination in other southern states. The goal is to identify common challenges, characteristics and patterns across groups so that strategies can be developed to enhance not only the accessibility but also the electability of marginalized candidates. Consequently, this research has serious practicality and real-life application. If the research concludes that “electability” and “accessibility” are influenced by characteristics like gender, race, or socioeconomic status, then it would mean that strategies and affirmative actions must be put into place to equalize the playing field. Diverse representation will lead to more favorable policy outcomes and a truer operationalization of the concept of democracy.

Upon conducting and transcribing these interviews, it became apparent that this research area has incredible implications for revealing causes of underrepresentation in government. It is my hope that researchers and academics expand upon the foundation laid by the qualitative research conducted in this paper. The narratives and answers gathered by the candidates interviewed highlight the necessity for further work in this

area. Ultimately, this paper will and should encourage further research and debate on the area of election accessibility and representation in Kentucky.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviewing past literature that has analyzed the campaigns of marginalized candidates can improve researchers' understanding of electoral disenfranchisement of those candidates. This review includes work from political news media, independent studies, and scholarly research in the social sciences, explaining both reasons for disenfranchisement and how it materializes against marginalized political candidates. This literature review will provide perspective and context to the difficulties marginalized political candidates face when running for public office through psychological, contextual, and structural factors.

### **Psychological Factors**

Psychological factors are most similar to the barriers or motives candidates face within their own mind. These factors include values, principles, or judgements that are conditioned through the candidates' experiences in society and their perception of themselves and others. Unfortunately, there was little research found on how or if psychological factors influence marginalized candidates.

### **Contextual Factors**

Contextual factors are factors that affect candidates in different ways based on their situation or identity. They are specific to the candidates' socio-economic situation, characteristics, identity, age, whether or not they are a parent, etc. The contextual factors

identified in existing research were factors that relate to voter perception, the way the media portrays candidates, and overall candidate “electability” or “viability”.

In the 21st century, there may not be a more influential electoral factor than media coverage. Constituents receive critical information about political candidates and figures from the media. In order to make an educated vote based on ideology and issues, citizens need information about the candidates (Graber & Dunaway, 2018). Thus, the media plays a large role in the accessibility that marginalized candidates have to winning an election. Reporters can capitalize on biases or prejudices of the public, cover stories that disproportionately affect particular candidates, and overarchingly serve as the watchdog and gatekeeper of American democracy (Brichacek et al., 2016). A large body of international research has found that the way the media chooses to report on marginalized candidates can often affect the candidates’ chance at being elected, with scholars often concluding that media coverage contributes to marginalized candidates’ struggles to curry favor with voters (Gershon, 2012). As Gershon (2012) states in “Media Coverage of Congresswoman and Voter Evaluations: Evidence from an Online Experimental Study”, “news media... may impact [candidates’] ability to build support among voters and win [re]election.... In a nation of more than 300 million, candidates are relying on news media to inform voters of their issue positions and build public support” (p. 702). If the media decides either not to cover a marginalized candidate or to switch the form of coverage away from the traditional coverage of policy and issue positions, it can impact the way voters perceive that marginalized candidate.

A substantial body of research shows that marginalized candidates have a greater likelihood to fall victim to journalistic malpractice, face more press scrutiny, capture on

average less favorable media coverage, and face more stereotypical issue and trait coverage (Bystrom, 2006; Campus, 2013; Coe & Griffin, 2020; Gershon, 2012; Kahn & Goldberg, 1991; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). To understand the biases of media coverage and the impact it may have on the “electability” of marginalized candidates, this literature review will identify prominent direct and indirect effects of negative or negligent media coverage.

Media coverage has direct and indirect effects on marginalized candidates and their chance at winning an election. First, direct effects of media coverage are the effects that manifest within a candidate's political campaign. These effects often materialize immediately after a reporter covers, interviews, or films a candidate. These media-based factors are often unique to marginalized groups and can serve as a barrier to winning an election (Campus, 2013). Direct effects of media coverage emerge from the content or type of coverage, the amount of coverage, and unintentional and intentional bias.

News agencies and reporters decide what they cover and produce when evaluating a political candidate. This can often negatively affect marginalized political candidates more than their counterparts (Sui et al, 2018). For example, according to Sui et al. (2018), “Coverage of minority candidates often emphasizes their race as something newsworthy in itself, and frames their candidacy as “unique” or historical... This draws attention away from minority candidates’ issues, focusing instead on traits... coverage [also] often focuses disproportionately on race-related issues, fueling the assumption that minority candidates have narrow policy interests” (p. 1082-1083). Candidates of color are often subject to media bias that can intentionally or unintentionally paint them as a candidate with plans to only address policy issues that directly affect the communities with which

they identify. This can incentivize voters who do not identify as similar to the candidate in this case, white voters to vote for the opposing candidate because they believe they are more aligned with their policy attitudes and preferences (Graber & Dunaway, 2018). This analysis extends beyond people of color. Media can disproportionately cover the economic background and policy preferences of lower socioeconomic groups running for office, or the marriage of an LGBTQ+ candidate who is gay, unintentionally prioritizing their identifying characteristics and papering over their issue positions.

Similarly, the content that reporters and agencies choose to report can reinforce and sustain harmful stereotypes of marginalized groups. These stereotypes can isolate voters and contribute to an “other” narrative of the marginalized candidate that hinders their ability to gain public support. Gershon (2012) explains this phenomenon in the context of gender, writing, “Women's coverage has been found to disproportionately focus on a narrow set of stereotypical “female” issues and traits as well as candidate appearance and gender” (p. 703). This is not true for solely women candidates and is indicative of a broader trend for marginalized candidates in general. Sadia Jamil, Jessica Retis, and Paul Murschetz (2020) write in “Media Discourses and Representation of Marginalized Communities in Multicultural Societies”, “Both theory and empirical research on media discourse suggests that stereotypes arise from and are maintained via interaction with the messages offered in mass media... [media] replicates part of the everyday biased practices against members of marginalized communities” (p. 2). Media can reinforce stereotypes as well as determine the perception that voters have of marginalized candidates and the propensity that their identity affects their chance at winning election.

Some researchers have disputed the claims that these stereotypes and biases exist in the media, arguing that media bias, instead, benefits existing political leaders and incumbents through name recognition and audience interest (Hayes & Lawless, 2015). However, these researchers dismiss the relationship that structural factors that are beneficial to traditional cisgender white candidates who are men, like incumbency, have with media coverage thus ignoring that media coverage is still disproportionately harmful to marginalized candidates.

Media can also harm the support of marginalized candidates by radicalizing their policy preferences and issue positions. Representation of marginalized groups is often symbolic as well as substantive (Ford, 2017). This means that marginalized candidates will often support policies and political parties that advance or produce beneficial outcomes for the identity group they represent. For example, women candidates have higher preferences for policies that align with women autonomy and reproductive rights. Similarly, lower socioeconomic candidates may support policies that advance social welfare programs or promote higher pay for low- to median-skill workers. These marginalized groups are more likely to support progressive changes and take positions that are considered more oppositional to the status quo instead of moderate. By using a political party's preferred terminology, quotes from partisan elites, and taking advantage of narrative and agenda partisan biases, the media uses the policy preferences of marginalized candidates to decrease voter support and "radicalize" the candidate (Ford, 2017; Graber & Dunaway, 2018).

Indirectly, media coverage can intimidate and dissuade marginalized candidates from ever deciding to run for public office (Ford, 2017; Sui et al., 2018). This is another



way media coverage represents a barrier to electoral victory for marginalized candidates. The information above refers to the relatively widespread knowledge and can give the impression that if a marginalized candidate runs for office, they face a high risk of having their privacy violated, having their identity targeted, and having to overcome a litany of voter and media biases that could take a heavy psychological and mental toll.

Similarly, the way candidates are portrayed by the media can affect their “viability” as a candidate or their “electability”. The media can change the perception that voters have of the candidate, making them seem less viable for all of the reasons that are listed above. If the media makes a marginalized candidate seem more radical, or emphasis their marginality, or even paint the candidate as an outsider, it can add to implicit voter biases and negatively affect the marginalized candidate.

### **Structural Factors**

Structural factors in the context of this paper refer to the rules, regulations, and laws that affect marginalized candidates when they run for office. These factors include institutional barriers like incumbency, navigating political parties, and overcoming political fundraising.

By definition, marginalized political candidates challenge the structure and make up of existing governments. The injustices experienced by marginalized communities and political candidates have emerged from long-standing discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion from conventional governance (Hedstrom & Smith, 2013). Although there have been political advances for marginalized communities in the last few decades, the overrepresentation of the political elite and governing leadership perpetuate systems of oppression, power, and privilege, resulting in minority communities experiencing

marginalization and discrimination (Kantamneni, 2020). The ability for marginalized communities in the United States to challenge these dominant political structures through elections is underdeveloped and can fall into a vicious cycle of marginalized candidates being tasked with the impossible goal of changing the system from within. This is exemplified in the incumbency advantage theory that persists and sustains the lack of marginalized individuals in political careers.

Incumbents are the individuals currently holding office, and in the context of an election, candidates will often use that advantage when running for reelection. Almost all research can verify that incumbents have a much larger chance at winning an election than their opponents, and this is true for every level of government. At first glance, this element of electoral politics does not seem to be inherently advantageous to any one category of political candidates. However, women, minority groups, and low-income candidates are all extremely less likely to be incumbents, given historic and current underrepresentation, which is in large part why the “incumbency advantage” is thought to be one of the most influential barriers preventing marginalized candidates from winning elections and overcoming marginalization (McGregor et al., 2017).

Both major American political parties can play a significant role in determining which candidates are recruited and whether candidates are given the proper resources to run a successful campaign. If a political party determines that an individual is not a “viable” candidate, they may avoid recruiting them, choose not to contribute needed resources, and in some extreme circumstances, discourage them from running for office (Kunovich & Paxton, 2005). This is why navigating political parties and gaining party

support is an important component of campaigning and necessary for marginalized candidates to successfully win elections.

There has been much research on the lack of non-elite, minority, and women leadership among national and established political parties across the globe (Brechenmacher & Hubbard, 2020). The two major American political parties have not been immune to this trend, often viewing marginalized candidates as liabilities and believing they are negatively perceived by voters. Doherty et al. (2018) explains, “one reason for the continued underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in office may be that, unless they view a minority candidate as sufficiently attractive on other dimensions, parties are less likely to recruit them” (p. 2). Research further explains that on state and local levels, party chairs are on average ten percentage points less likely to see a candidate that is black or Latinx as a successful candidate when compared to a white candidate (Doherty et al., 2018). At every level of government in the United States, it becomes more challenging to win an election without the support of a major political party. Parties will need to begin equally recruiting and supporting marginalized candidates if we hope to have more marginalized individuals run for public office.

Similarly, ideology among the elites of political parties can affect the rate at which marginalized candidates are recruited and supported by that party. Kunovich & Paxton (2005) explain the specific impact this can have on women candidates writing, “While we find ideology influences the gender composition of party elites in a country and the percentage of women candidates, we do *not* find that ideology influences how well women fare at the polls... parties may be overly sensitive to the perceived liability of women as candidates, when in fact, women have equal success as candidates across all

regions of the world” (p. 541). Furthermore, an electoral system where only two major parties determine all viable political candidates may contribute to the barriers marginalized candidates face in American political parties. Kunovich & Paxton (2005) explain, “complacent parties do not feel pressure to field women—without marginal parties challenging the more complacent, established parties, women’s representation as candidates is reduced” (p. 541).

Working class and low-income Americans rarely become public officials. The working class of America make up fifty-two percent of the population, yet make up two percent of Congress, three percent of state legislators, and ten percent of city council members. No one from the working class or below has ever gone on to become a governor of a state or a Supreme Court justice (Carnes, 2018). In this way, working class and low-income communities are the most underrepresented marginalized group in the United States. It is well documented that folks with disabilities, LGBTQ people, women, and people of color are disproportionately within this economic class and, thus, are forced to overcome the barriers that affect every part of their intersectional identity. Researchers have attempted to identify the main cause of the underrepresentation of the working class, mainly focusing on individual voters and turnout trends. This literature review will focus on the few researchers that have analyzed the unique barriers working class political candidates face when running for office.

The obstacles and barriers that marginalized working class political candidates face when running for office often begin before they even decide to run. In fact, researchers have found that one of the biggest reasons that working class communities are so underrepresented in government is because so few working class people decide to

run for office. Carnes (2018) writes, “the real barrier to working class representation seems to be that workers just don’t run in the first place. In national surveys of state legislative candidates in 2012 and 2014, for instance, former workers made up just 4 percent of candidates (and around 3 percent of winners)” (p. 7).

There are many documented and researched factors that contribute to the lack of desire that working class Americans have to run for public office. Aside from local campaigns, it is difficult to run for office without taking time off work and losing your income, a luxury working and lower-class Americans do not have (Carnes, 2018). Only the very well off can typically afford to sacrifice their day job or a large portion of their income. This uniquely screens out poorer Americans long before Election Day and may be the largest reason for such mass underrepresentation of the working class and below.

Furthermore, similar to our analysis in “Navigating Political Parties”, extended research shows that party leaders and elites often prefer professional and economic elite candidates to working and lower-class candidates. Carnes (2016) explains, “gatekeepers do, in fact, privilege professional candidates: they report that workers make up disproportionately small percentages of the candidates they recruit, they perceive workers as bad candidates, and they choose white-collar candidates over blue-collar workers in hypothetical exercises.... party leaders are more likely to view workers as bad fundraisers in places where elections are expensive, for instance” (p. 27). Although there is no evidence of working class candidates resembling “bad” political candidates, party leaders and political elites believe that working class Americans have a hard time raising money and winning elections (Carnes, 2016). A wide body of evidence suggests that the rich are

recruiting the next generation of American politicians and are largely excluding those who are not economic elites.

## RESEARCH

### **A Note on Terminology**

Electoral disenfranchisement traditionally refers to the revocation of suffrage or practices that prevent a person or group from exercising their right to vote. In this paper, the term is extended to also encompass a person or groups ability to participate in electoral politics through candidacy and political campaigns.

Marginalized groups include members of the working class, people of color, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. For the purpose of this study, the term *people of color* refers to people who are not white or of European parentage. The term *women* refers to any person who identifies as such. The term *working class* will be defined as a category of economic class where an individual makes \$15 an hour or less: a full-time annual salary of \$31,200 before taxes.

Clearly, there are limitations to making concrete generalizations about the obstacles these communities face when campaigning, as there are considerable variations within each of these groups. This research is conducted with the understanding that marginalized communities are not monolithic and their experiences differ. Furthermore, the study will include individuals who have multiple identifying characteristics which may cause overlap between communities studied. These groups are by no means mutually exclusive. This paper will often use the term “intersectionality” to identify subjects interviewed who identify with more than one of these identities. The term “intersectionality” will be defined as the interconnected nature of social identity such as

class, race, gender, and LGBTQ+ status of an individual when referring to disadvantages faced by these groups.

*Electability* refers to the ability for a political candidate to get elected to public office.

### **Interviewing Marginalized Candidates in Kentucky**

To explore whether or not marginalized candidates face unique obstacles when running for public office, a qualitative approach with one-on-one interviews with a convenience sampling in Kentucky of ten political candidates was utilized. Interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom and were roughly thirty to forty-five minutes long. The data was then collected and transcribed through an artificial intelligence software. Every identity characteristic listed in the definition of marginalization was represented in this study.

Interviews were conducted in Spring 2021 and the sample was decided by convenience. Candidates were emailed with an IRB approved recruitment email and those that responded and agreed to the interview were included in the sample. There were seven Democrats and three Republicans interviewed. Four of the candidates interviewed were candidates of color. One candidate interviewed was a woman of color. Two candidates interviewed were members of the working class prior to running for office. Five candidates interviewed were women. One candidate identified as LGBTQ+.

One-on-one interviews offered valuable insight into the relationship between variables that cannot be so easily and fully examined with a large random sample. Focused interviews with a limited sample lend itself to an examination of psychological, contextual and structural factors that affect participation. With qualitative data, the

concentration is not just on an identification of possible correlations between relationships, but rather an understanding of those relationships. The kind of concerns and questions raised by this paper demanded in-depth interviews. Furthermore, the survey questions used to guide conversations with candidates are attached to this paper and can be seen below. These were the questions that guided all the interviews conducted.

The findings of this paper are determined by the responses gathered in interviews. Responses will be quoted, summarized, and paraphrased for analysis. All the referenced interviewees in this paper have consented to being recorded and have approved that their answers are included in the data. Furthermore, the analysis will attempt to find general trends among the interviewed candidates and establish some quantifiable data to help illustrate findings.

### **Limitations**

This study aims to highlight the experiences of marginalized candidates when campaigning and identify barriers those candidates faced when running for office. However, there are limitations that restrict complete accuracy and reliability of the data collected in this paper.

First, this paper did not compare the experiences of marginalized candidates to their opponents, even when their opponents did not meet the definition of “marginalized” as identified in the paper. This creates room to question whether or not the experiences of marginalized candidates are also experiences of non-marginalized candidates. This is perhaps the biggest limitation in the paper and is partially resolved with the diverse answers collected from the various candidates with different demographics. Furthermore,



this limitation is also partially reduced considering a large portion of the barriers faced by these candidates are directly related to their identified characteristic that makes them marginalized, meaning the barriers are unique to their identity.

Second, this paper's analysis was reliant on only ten candidates all of whom were determined by the convenience to the researcher. It is obviously possible that the small number of candidates interviewed are not representative of the broader population. However, the concentration of the interviews and the in-depth analysis for the paper was only achievable through one-on-one interviews with the candidates. Similarly, these candidates were able to explain the details of their experience and the way the variables studied related to them and their campaign. This provides compelling reasons to believe that the in-depth interviews conducted were so detailed and investigatory that they were able to overcome the inaccuracies that would come with a smaller survey population. It is similarly important to emphasize that this is a nascent area of participation that is not often researched or analyzed, this study is an initial attempt to establish factors that will guide the questions to ask of a broader survey and larger sample size.

Third, the vast majority of the interviewed candidates won their respective election. This is because it was much easier to gather the contact information of former candidates who are now government employees as opposed to candidates who had lost their election. This means there is a potential that more barriers exist for marginalized candidates than those that were identified in this paper, given that marginalized candidates not interviewed who have lost elections may face different barriers than those who win.

Regardless of these limitations, this research remains important and relevant for future studies.

## ANALYSIS

Interviews were conducted with a wide variety of responses and experiences shared by candidates. This portion of the paper will identify trends within candidate responses and categorize these responses to find overall similarities and differences. The categories chosen will be organized as entire sections below. The analysis will mainly focus on psychological, contextual, and structural factors that affect candidates participation and ultimate chance of winning the election.

Each factor will be introduced with a brief definition and overall trends common among all candidates interviewed, followed by more specific sections that focus on particular groups and factors unique to their identities. It is worth noting that while these categories will provide the paper with detailed and thorough organization, the categories are not inclusive of all the factors that contribute to or hinder the “electability” of marginalized candidates. Furthermore, some factors may overlap or intersect within the differing categories.

### **Psychological Factors**

Psychological factors are most similar to the barriers or motives candidates face within their own mind. These factors include values, principles, or judgements that are conditioned through the candidates experiences in society and their perception of themselves and others. For example, a psychological factor that may contribute to a candidate running for office could be both socialization and altruism; two things that are

products of the candidate's surroundings but are ultimately materialized within the candidates own mind.

There are consistencies among the candidates interviewed which demonstrate that marginalized groups face similar psychological factors when running for public office. First, socialization was identified as a barrier among all ten candidates interviewed. Only three candidates interviewed had participated in student government when in school, many even felt that they were discouraged or prioritized less by other students or teachers due to their identity. This similar trend was seen when they considered running for office as well. Some even stated a large barrier to them running, or a reason they did not run sooner, is because there were few elected officials who shared their identity. Furthermore, not a single candidate interviewed had family members run for office or win an elected seat of any kind before them. All of this resembles the kind of barrier socialization presents to marginalized candidates. Similar to the findings in the literature review, it is a barrier in of itself to overcome marginalization, something prevalent in the process of socialization.

The second psychological factor consistent among all candidates interviewed was the principle of altruism as a motive that drove candidates to run for office. This factor was not a barrier but instead a sort of vehicle that motivated and encouraged marginalized candidates to run and in many cases, win. In every single interview, candidates explained the necessity of having new representation in leadership to help their particular community. Similarly, every candidate interviewed, from both major political parties, mentioned the results of the 2016 election as something that fueled them to run for office. One candidate stated, "But it was clear that we didn't have anyone in political leadership

who also wanted to make that positive change in our community. And it was clear. We weren't gonna make any real progress on the systemic issues underlying why we have so much poverty and racism and homophobia and all this hatred.” This response, although different in wording or emphasis, was seen among every candidate interviewed.

Psychological factors also differed based on the identity of the candidate. This next portion of the paper will bring to light and explain beneficial and harmful psychological factors that were experienced by specific groups.

### **Psychological Factors, BIPOC Women & Candidates of Color**

Similar to the general findings mentioned above, candidates of color, especially women of color, explained that there was a strong necessity to get elected leadership that resembled their identity and values. One candidate explains while with a group of Latin-x and black women, “we were just talking about how our politicians at the local, state, and federal level didn't reflect our beliefs and values. And we said, we got to stop complaining. One of us has to run.” Moreover, there were some psychological factors that were specific to candidates of color. While these candidates faced other barriers too, these refer to the clearest psychological factors that were specific to women and men of color. There were two psychological factors that were more prevalent among candidates of color: religious motivations and navigating white fragility.

Candidates of color, particularly black candidates, were much more likely to cite religion as something that motivated them to run for office and would often talk about religion in the interview. Three of the four candidates of color referenced religion as a motive that encouraged them to run for office. In this way, religion serves as a beneficial psychological factor to candidates of color that encourage their candidacy and convince

some to even run in the first place. One candidate explains, “hopefully one of my grandchildren or even my children will seek public office someday... it's a noble calling next to being called to serve God in some ministry or rabbi capacity like that, being called to public service is one of the most noble callings one can have.” Another candidate explains they were convinced to run by their church and felt a strong “spiritual” connection to serving their community in public office. Regardless, it became clear that religion was a strong incentive or factor for many candidates of color.

Another psychological factor cited by candidates of color was the challenge of representing a majority white district, county, etc. Although some cited blatant acts of discrimination or racism, which will be shown later in this paper, most candidates of color talked more about the challenge of supporting their communities while also conforming to a majority white constituency. In this way, candidates would often modify language or ideas in order to not turn off white voters. Navigating white fragility, especially amid the Black Lives Matter movements, may be one psychological factor to consider that candidates of color uniquely face in a way other candidates do not.

### **Psychological Factors, White Women**

Interviews with candidates who identified as a woman indicated that women candidates face unique psychological factors that act mainly as barriers to running for and winning public office. A recognizable trend among these candidates is that they are, in general, less comfortable running for public office and have been socialized to feel less supported and less confident when running, compared to men. This was particularly evident in necessary components of a campaign like fundraising and canvassing or interacting with voters.

Two women candidates articulated that asking for large sums of money was an uncomfortable experience when first running for office. As they progressed in their campaign, this psychological barrier eventually seemed to decrease. One candidate talks about seeing this at an Emerge (a group working to train women candidates to win public office) training, explaining, “Emerge had everybody put up names and amounts on the wall and then they asked for different things people noticed... And one of the participants said, it looks like the men have put down twice as much as the women and the trainers were like, yes. And that literally happens in every single place we have ever trained.” This was a trend among all women candidates, and it was common for those candidates to explain how men acted differently in ways where they would assume they are most able or deserving, even outside of fundraising.

The next, and perhaps most obvious, psychological factor affecting women candidates is the overwhelming expectation for women candidates to not be too emotional but also not too masculine. These candidates often talk about the burden of finding a medium between femininity and masculinity, citing the effect that their attitudes and emotions could have on voters. One candidate explains how she could not talk about certain issues because it would make her “emotional” in the eye of the voter which would “throw them off”. Another candidate explains a few examples of blatant sexism that made her dress a certain way when canvassing, not being able to wear certain things like a “ponytail” because she would get asked questions like “Why are you not home taking care of the kids?” or “How old are you?”. These are all examples of how psychological factors mentioned in the interviews come to fruition.

## **Psychological Factors, Working Class Candidates**

Working class candidates encounter unique psychological factors when running for public office. These psychological factors are mainly a product of a background in poverty and economic hardship. The conditions faced while in economic deprivation often translate to the candidate's mental state and thought process while they are executing the necessary functions of a successful campaign. The psychological factors discovered in the interviews include poverty associated mental and physical trauma, imposter syndrome, and mental barriers to fundraising.

With limited economic resources, people in poverty and even working class people often suffer unique forms of trauma, toxic stress, and damages to the body from a lack of necessities like healthcare and food. This creates conditions where political candidates from this background are at both a mental and physical disadvantage when participating in campaign activities like canvassing. One candidate emphasizes the effect their economic situation had on their health, explaining, "My body is physically a lot older than my biological age, and I have autoimmune issues and high blood pressure and other things like that that are not in my family history and that are most likely caused by the toxic stress I faced as a kid." Another candidate identifies their history in poverty as a sort of barrier, explaining, "it's really challenging that my body is not as strong as my passion for this work."

Similar to the physical and mental toll economic hardship can inflict on folks, conditions that emerged from poverty can cause discomfort and a sense of not belonging for working class candidates. For the purpose of this paper, we call this "imposter syndrome", a term used by two working class candidates that were interviewed. These

candidates explain that being at professional or “elite” events was something they had to learn and adapt to while running for office. They often were not used to these kinds of events and had little experience being with wealthy donors. One candidate even told me that they did not feel like themselves at these events, that they created a new person who would “fake it” or “act” differently than if they were being themselves. The candidate explains, “I felt very odd being there because it was clear that this was for a certain type of person and I was not that person... I felt like I had to fake it till I made it a lot. So I had a lot of what's the phrase, imposter syndrome, all the time during the campaign.” Some of these candidates quite literally had to psychologically change themselves in order to fit the “ideal” candidate that donors could fund.

The final psychological factor that became evident among interviews with working class candidates was the barrier of asking for donations. This is a similar barrier to the one identified among women candidates. The working class candidates interviewed unanimously agreed that asking for money was an uncomfortable and unnatural process for them in the campaign. One candidate said, “If you grow up poor, asking for money is just the worst feeling because you grow up in a situation where you need money, where you have actual needs... needs that you can't necessarily meet no matter how hard you work. Money means much more to you... There's this thing where people who are more affluent and come from an affluent background, I believe that they find it easier to ask people for money.” Conversely, some working class candidates acknowledged this psychological barrier but overcame it while campaigning. One candidate explains, “It was absolutely a challenge... And then I remember talking to someone who said, if you are making assumptions about what people can give, then you're no better than the people



you're trying to replace in office... I was making assumptions about people I knew who grew up in the projects like me...I had to stop myself.” Regardless, this barrier persists among working class candidates and is no doubt a psychological factor they encounter when running for office.

### **Contextual Factors**

Contextual factors are factors that affect candidates in different ways based on their situation or identity. They are specific to the candidate’s socio-economic situation, characteristics, identity, age, whether or not they are a parent, etc. While these factors can be specific to the candidate interviewed, this paper will identify trends based on the marginalized group(s) with which the candidate identifies. There was one overarching trend among all marginalized groups; marginalized candidates felt that they were not taken seriously, whether it be among voters, the media, or their competition.

This is where the term “electability” or “viability” often makes an appearance. The perception of voters, donors, or the competition may be that the candidates have less of a chance of winning simply because they identify with a marginalized group. One candidate explains, “I don't think I was taken as seriously, I was going up against an incumbent and he was white man... It never felt like I was taken seriously as a so-called viable candidate, which is a terrible term because oftentimes that means people like me aren't considered viable.” Similarly, every marginalized candidate talked about some challenge that arose with their competition being backed by big donors or some group or PAC because the competing candidate was more “viable”. Candidates explain they were not given “larger donations by big donors” because they were not “viable” and that “particularly powerful groups” were donating to the “competition, because they were not

a political outsider.” This can serve as a massive barrier to these marginalized candidates and often sustain elections that do not represent marginalized groups.

### **Contextual Factors, BIPOC Women & Candidates of Color**

Along with not being considered a “viable” candidate, candidates of color often experienced blatant racism and had unique experiences with voters that other candidates did not. There were many experiences and stories shared from candidates of color that exemplify some contextual factors that make their experience running for office more difficult and different from other candidates. This paper will highlight two examples that were shared from two candidates interviewed. One candidate said it often affected the way they were perceived by voters when canvassing, stating, “When I would go knock on doors in the East end, predominantly white part of the district, people wouldn't open the door for me. They would peep through their blinds and close the blinds and not open the door.” Another candidate describes racist remarks made by both voters and their competitor explaining, “the Saturday after the election, I came outside to go to work in the morning. I was leaving and looked through the rear-view mirror. Someone spray painted the N word on the front of our house... I mean, the guy that I ran against ... his campaign motto was “one of us standing up for us”, implying that I'm not one of us, you know.” Both of these excerpts highlight some of the unique contextual barriers candidates of color can face when running for office. While it is important to note two candidates of color reported little to no racism when running, these experiences resemble some factors that can affect a candidate when running.

## **Contextual Factors, Women Candidates**

Women candidates also experience unique contextual factors. Similar to the psychological factors explained above, the contextual factors that affect women candidates vary from expectations about appearance to what is perceived as the responsibilities of a mom. This section of the paper will focus on the contextual factors that relate to candidates who are mothers as well as some contextual factors that affect women candidates in general.

The women candidates that were interviewed would often talk about the hardships and barriers they faced as a parent running for office. This factor was only mentioned by women candidates in interviews, even when candidates who were men were parents as well. One candidate explains that, as a mom, “It was a challenge balancing, being a mom and being in a relationship with, you know, normal expectations of time and attention.” Another candidate said, “I was a single mom with two kids, so I had a full-time job and a part-time job when I first ran for office and I still work full time. I have to, that's how I pay the bills and my daughter's in college. So that was a barrier.” These empirics show the unique challenge women candidates experience when running for office as a parent. Moreover, candidates explained they felt there was a higher expectation for women to take care of kids instead of running for office, as mentioned previously under the psychological factors.

Interestingly, another contextual factor experienced by three women candidates was a factor related to recruiting support and financial backing. These women explained how, because they were a woman, they did not get the same kind of backing as a candidate who is not a woman. This was particularly true for support from union and

labor groups. One candidate said, “I had all of organized labor working against me in my primary, which was really hard and awful. Even the women in organized labor seemed to be pretty male oriented. So being a woman felt like a lot to overcome... there was always language about supporting the brotherhood, even when I was talking with women.” This was a really interesting barrier that seems to be unique to women candidates. Candidates further explained that some voters and donors would not support them because they “didn’t understand their struggles” or had “someone else in mind.”

### **Contextual Factors, Working Class Candidates**

The most notable contextual factor affecting working class candidates is the challenge to gather financial resources when running for office. There are a lot of reasons for this challenge that were mentioned in interviews. However, if you are to take one thing from this section, note that every single candidate interviewed said the campaigning process needs to be more accessible to the “everyday” American. There was no greater barrier mentioned by candidates than the barrier of not having enough financial resources and/or being working class and running for office.

The first contextual factor that was emphasized by every working class candidate was the inability to take off work to campaign effectively. Candidates noted that their “wealthier” competitors had “no problem” taking off work in order to canvass or make phone calls. One candidate even said their competitors' boss “encouraged” their competitor to run for office and continued to pay the competitor while they ran. It seemed that when a candidate had a more “professional” career or job, that candidate would have a greater ability to put aside their career to run for office. Another candidate said that the overwhelming majority of their competitors were “realtors” who were “well-funded” and

could spend “thousands” on ads and sponsors without actually canvassing. Furthermore, two candidates emphasized that their competition was “retired” and had a ton of free time and money to campaign effectively. With less time and ability to campaign, these working class candidates face an immense barrier preventing them from accessing the same advantages these “wealthier” groups have.

Another contextual factor affecting working class candidates and their ability to garner financial resources is the difference in their network of fundraisers compared to wealthier candidates. Similar to the psychological factors that affected working class candidates, these candidates rarely had a network of wealthy donors or contributors because they did not have the same opportunities to grow this network and/or came from a background where most of their family and friends were “less affluent”. This meant it was much more challenging for these candidates to obtain the same kind of resources as candidates that did have that network. This was a consensus among every working class candidate interviewed.

### **Structural Factors**

Structural factors in the context of this paper refer to the rules, regulations, and laws that affect marginalized candidates when they run for office. Several of these factors have already been mentioned in the literature review and were similarly brought up as factors that affected these candidates in the interviews. These structural factors are relatively similar for all marginalized candidates and the structures mentioned that affected these candidates were consistent. Structural factors analyzed included the incumbency advantage and political parties.

In eight of the interviews, candidates explained the challenge of running against an incumbent. Three of the candidates interviewed said they were running against incumbents who were in office for more than twenty years. There are a number of barriers this creates for marginalized candidates. Incumbents traditionally benefit from name recognition, experience, and relationships with donors and other political actors. Consequently, eight candidates felt that they were a “political outsider” and were not seen as “viable” considering they were running against someone who had been in office for so long.

Another evident structural factor affecting marginalized candidates is the failure of the two major political parties to recruit, train, and prioritize marginalized candidates. This was mentioned as a one of the largest barriers facing marginalized candidates in three interviews. One candidate explained, “The party needs to be completely restructured... it's misogynistic and racist. I don't see them doing a lot for black candidates. It still operates very much like old style politics, things being hammered out in closed meetings with the, you know, the official power brokers. And I think it's a huge problem. I think it's a huge barrier for underrepresented groups.”

Candidates also explained that they received little to no support from their political party, that to receive any assistance they had to pay the political party. One candidate said, “You have to use their platform, it's \$500... My household fundraising was hard. That \$500 took a bite out for me. That was hard. And so for folks who don't have the luxuries, the privileges that I have, it could be just an absolute barrier from the beginning.” It is also notable that many marginalized candidates felt isolated, ignored, and even as though their communities were not a priority for the party to assist. One

candidate stated, “I’m a huge critic of the party. I fought them for allowing Kentucky to go 20 years without having a black woman in office. I mean, how dare you? You’re the party that claims you want black people to be part of your party and you lean on black women to save every single election, but then you didn’t do the work to make sure that two decades didn’t go without a child seeing a black woman in office.” There was a strong consensus among the candidates interviewed that the political parties in the state needed to do more to assist marginalized candidates.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The importance of this research cannot be overstated, and although this research has limitations and is introductory in nature, it sheds light on barriers affecting marginalized candidates running for office. Telling the stories of these candidates is in itself a reason for the existence of this paper, these stories will encourage others to continue research in this area. The psychological, contextual, and structural factors that affect these candidates persist every election and create conditions where marginalized candidates are at an inherent disadvantage when running for office. In the words of a candidate interviewed, “we cannot change the minds of people who already have their mind made up” but we can encourage society and government to change accordingly to address these barriers.

My research proposes three recommendations to help marginalized candidates have a “fair shot” at running for office and winning. These recommendations mainly address structural factors, and spill over to address psychological and contextual factors. The three recommendations include expanding support for nonprofits that assist

marginalized candidates, encouraging political parties to recruit and support these candidates at greater levels, and enacting limits on campaign expenditures and financial contributions.

Every woman candidate interviewed mentioned a nonprofit, Emerge, that substantially aided them when running for public office. This nonprofit recruits and trains women candidates to run for office in Kentucky. There are a plethora of benefits that candidates mentioned that were garnered from participating in the Emerge program. Candidates networked with each other, learned and shared valuable information about the process of campaigning, and were given gender specific documents that assisted them with fundraising, communication, etc. Candidates reported the need for more nonprofits like Emerge. One candidate stated, “but I would want a training program specifically for black people, indigenous people, and Latin-x folks who are interested in running for office here in Kentucky, like specific to us.” As a whole, there needs to be more support for nonprofits that aid marginalized candidates. This could help break barriers that stem from factors like the incumbency advantage and a lack of political experience.

The second recommendation is to encourage political parties to restructure their recruiting and training process to prioritize and assist marginalized candidates. As stated previously in the structural factors section, many candidates emphasized the lack of support given by their political party. Respondents accused both political parties of not doing enough for marginalized candidates. Academics, candidates, and others should encourage political parties to prioritize recruiting marginalized candidates to run for public office and should support their campaigns when they do.



The final recommendation is to limit financial contributions and campaign expenditures. This paper will not define how much should be allowed to be spent and/or given in a campaign, but rather, shed light on how inaccessible running for office is for the “everyday” person and how that uniquely disadvantages marginalized candidates. One candidate explained this barrier well, stating, “If you talk about marginalized candidates, it's almost impossible for just the ordinary working person to run. You have to have money today to run and that's wrong. Anybody should be able to run, regardless of their financial resources, they should be able to run for office. And we've got to get to the point where ordinary people can both run for office and participate by voting.”

If competitive campaigns are to ever be representative of the demographics of the state or country, then they will need to be accessible for marginalized groups. Excluding marginalized groups by incentivizing the powerful and rich to run for office is counterintuitive to encouraging diversity in politics. This is why seven of the candidates interviewed cited garnering financial resources as a particularly important barrier that marginalized candidates face.

These recommendations are in no way the only way to resolve the barriers that marginalized candidates face when running for office, nor are these recommendations all-inclusive in addressing the barriers identified in the paper. However, they are a strong starting place to work toward providing access for marginalized candidates. The factors identified in the interviews will assist academics in finding more recommendations in future research.

The main purpose of this paper is to give a voice to marginalized candidates. The factors and recommendations stem from their analysis and their shared experiences.

While introductory in nature, this research serves an important purpose. Representation is an important component of democracy, and its accuracy and efficacy are foundational to equal policy prioritization and resources for all. Thus, it is important that all groups have a “fair shot” at running for and winning public office.

## REFERENCES

- Blazina, C., & DeSilver, D. (2021, January 22). A record number of women are serving in the 117th Congress. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/15/a-record-number-of-women-are-serving-in-the-117th-congress/>
- Brechenmacher, S., & Hubbard, C. (2020, March 24). Breaking the cycle of gender exclusion in political party development. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/24/breaking-cycle-of-gender-exclusion-in-political-party-development-pub-81345>
- Brichacek, A. (2020, October 12). Six ways the media influence elections. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <https://journalism.uoregon.edu/news/six-ways-media-influences-elections>
- Bystrom, D. (2006). Gender and Campaign Communication: TV Ads, Web Sites, and Media Coverage. *UC Berkeley Working Papers*.
- Campus, D. (2013). Media coverage of women leaders. *Women Political Leaders and the Media*, 39-53. doi:10.1057/9781137295545\_4
- Carnes, N. (2016). Keeping Workers Off the Ballot Electoral Gatekeepers and the Shortage of Candidates from the Working Class.
- Carnes, N. (2018, October 24). Working-class people are underrepresented in politics. the problem isn't voters. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/10/24/18009856/working-class-income-inequality-randy-bryce-alexandria-ocasio-cortez>

Coe, K., & Griffin, R. A. (2020). Marginalized identity Invocation online: The case of President Donald Trump on Twitter. *Social Media + Society*, 6(1), 205630512091397. doi:10.1177/2056305120913979

Costa, M. (2017). How responsive are political elites? A meta-analysis of experiments on public officials. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 4(3), 241-254. doi:10.1017/xps.2017.14

Doherty, D., Dowling Michael G. Miller, C. M., & Miller, M. G. (2018). How local political party leaders perpetuate the underrepresentation of minorities in U.S. Government. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <https://scholars.org/contribution/how-local-political-party-leaders-perpetuate-underrepresentation-minorities-us>

Ford, L. (2017). *Women and Politics: The pursuit of equality* (4th ed.). Westview Press.

Gershon, S. A. (2012). Media coverage of minority congresswomen and voter evaluations. *Political Research Quarterly*, 66(3), 702-714. doi:10.1177/1065912912467851

Graber, D. A., & Dunaway, J. (2018). *Mass media and American politics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Haider, A., & Schweitzer, J. (2020, March 05). The poverty Line matters, but it isn't Capturing everyone it should. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/news/2020/03/05/481314/poverty-line-matters-isnt-capturing-everyone/>

- Hayes, D., & Lawless, J. L. (2015). A non-gendered LENS? Media, voters, and female candidates in Contemporary congressional elections. *Perspectives on Politics*, 13(1), 95-118. doi:10.1017/s1537592714003156
- Hedström, J., & Smith, J. (2013). *Overcoming political exclusion: Strategies for marginalized groups to successfully engage in political decision-making*. Stockholm, Sweden: International IDEA.
- Jamil, S., Retis, J., & Murschetz, P. (Eds.). (2019). *Journalism Practice* (10th ed., Vol. 13). Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Kahn, K. F., & Goldenberg, E. N. (1991). Women candidates in the news: An examination of gender differences in u.s. senate campaign coverage. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 55(2), 180. doi:10.1086/269251
- Kantamneni, N. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized populations in the United states: A research agenda. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 119, 103439. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103439
- Kunovich, S., & Paxton, P. (2005). Pathways to power: The role of political parties in women's national political representation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 111(2), 505-552. doi:10.1086/444445
- Martin, N. S., & Blinder, S. (2020). Biases at the ballot box: How multiple forms of voter discrimination impede the descriptive and substantive representation of ethnic minority groups. *Political Behavior*. doi:10.1007/s11109-020-09596-4
- McGregor, R. M., Moore, A., Jackson, S., Bird, K., & Stephenson, L. B. (2017). Why so few women and minorities in local politics?: Incumbency and affinity voting in

low information elections. *Representation*, 53(2), 135-152.

doi:10.1080/00344893.2017.1354909

Robbins, L. (2018, November 02). State Supreme courts are overwhelmingly white and male. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/state-supreme-courts-are-overwhelmingly-white-and-male>

Rodriguez, J. M., & Capotescu, C. (2018, May 31). Analysis | poor people die younger in the U.S. that skews American politics. Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/05/31/because-poor-people-die-younger-in-the-u-s-our-politics-are-more-unequal-than-elsewhere/>

Sharma, V. (2021, January 05). The 117th Congress is the most diverse class yet.

Retrieved March 01, 2021, from <https://nowthisnews.com/politics/the-117th-us-congress-is-the-most-diverse-class-yet>

Sui, M., Paul, N., Shah, P., Spurlock, B., Chastant, B., & Dunaway, J. (2018). The role of Minority Journalists, candidates, and audiences in Shaping Race-Related campaign news coverage. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(4), 1079-1102. doi:10.1177/1077699018762078

Van der Pas, D. J., & Aaldering, L. (2020). Gender differences in political media coverage: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Communication*, 70(1), 114-143.

doi:10.1093/joc/jqz046

Ward, O. (2016). Intersectionality and press coverage of political campaigns. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22(1), 43-66.

doi:10.1177/1940161216673195

Wiltz, Teresa. (2015, December 09). Why State Legislatures Are Still Pretty White.

Retrieved March 29, 2021, from <https://www.governing.com/archive/legislative-boundaries-lack-of-connections-lead-to-few-minority-lawmakers.html>

## APPENDIX A: RECRUITING EMAIL

Subject - WKU CE/T Interview - Isaac Keller

Name,

My name is Isaac Keller, I have been involved in a few political races in Kentucky and am a senior at the Mahurin Honors College at Western Kentucky University. I am writing my undergraduate thesis with Dr. Saundra Ardrey on the barriers, if any, that marginalized political candidates face when running for office in Kentucky. I think your perspective and story would be incredibly important for this project.

I'm sure you're busy, but I'd love the opportunity to ask you questions about your experience campaigning in Kentucky and your reason for running for office. The interview should take around thirty to forty-five minutes and I'll be sure to send you all questions ahead of time if you participate.

Thank you for your time,

Name,

Thank you for agreeing to participate! I can't tell you how much I appreciate your help. The interview shouldn't take more than forty-five minutes and I'm pretty much free anytime \_\_\_\_\_. I've attached the survey questions below, if you find time please write your responses to the first 3 questions and send them back to this email so that our interview can begin at "Has any member of your family, that you know of, been elected to public office?".

Thanks again,

Isaac



## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### FOUNDATION

1. What is your name?
  - a. What is your age?
  - b. Where are you from?
  - c. What is your ethnicity?
  - d. What race do you identify as?
  - e. What is your gender identity?
  - f. What is your sexual orientation?
  - g. What is your immigration status?
  - h. What was your annual income at the job you worked prior to your current elected position?
2. What is the highest degree of education you have attained?
  - a. What school did you attend?
  - b. Was it a public or private school?
  - c. Did you vote or run for student office while in school?
3. What is your political affiliation?
  - a. What is your party affiliation?
4. Has any member of your family, that you know of, been elected to public office?
5. What position do you currently hold or have held?
6. How long have you held that position?
7. Do you plan on running for re-election?
6. How many times have you run for public office? If more than one, what positions?
7. Why did you decide to run for public office?
8. Why did you decide to run for the position you currently hold?
9. Describe who made up your campaign team.

10. Describe your campaign competition.

#### INVESTIGATORY

11. What were some challenges you faced, if any, when running for public office?

12. Do you think your (race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, income) played a role in

- a. your campaign?
- b. the way you were perceived by voters?
- c. the way you were treated by voters?
- d. your interaction with voters?
- e. the way you were covered in the media?
- f. recruitment of volunteers and staff?
- g. fundraising?
- h. the outcome of the election?

13. What advice would you give to anyone thinking of running for an elected position?

15. If you run for office again

- a. what would you do differently?
- b. what type of support would you want from your political party?
- c. what changes would you make in any institutional barriers, constraints or obstacles?

16. Is there anything you want to add that we may have missed in our conversation?