

# **Political Ambition and Constituent Service: Does Ambition Influence How Local Officials Respond to Electoral and Non-Electoral Service Requests?**

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## **Abstract:**

Theoretically, political ambitions paired with elections generate more responsive elected officials. In this paper, we test whether the progressive political ambitions of public officials affect whether and how they respond to their constituents by conducting an experimental audit study where local public officials receive both an electorally related service request and a generic service request. We combine their responses (or non-responses) with data from a survey of these public officials conducted months prior about their political ambition in seeking higher office. We find that politically ambitious officials (and specifically public officials who are interested in higher office “if the opportunity presents itself) are more responsive to electorally oriented service requests and that there are systematic differences in the content of the responses of ambitious and non-ambitious elected officials. The political ambition of democratically elected representatives affects the responsiveness to and concern for constituent requests.

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*“The politician as office seeker engages in political acts and makes decisions appropriate to gaining office”*  
*-Joseph Schlesinger (1966, 6)*

Democratic theory holds that the combination of elections and political ambition elicits democratic responsiveness. Writing in 1966, Joseph Schlesinger noted that “the central assumption of ambition theory is that a politician’s behavior is a response to his office goal” (6). Thus theoretically, political ambition paired with elections is the means by which constituents generate responsive actions from their elected representatives.

In addition, scholars have long recognized that the way in which the representative interacts with their constituents is as important as or more important than the legislative actions they take and have highlighted the importance of responsiveness to constituent requests (Butler and Broockman 2011; Clingermayer and Feiock 1994; Fenno 1978; Koop 2016; Oliver 2012). Constituency services are essential to the job of an elected official (especially at the local level) (Clingermayer and Feiock 1994; Koop 2016; Oliver 2012; Serra and Cover 1992; Welch and Bledsoe 1988). They affect political careers (Cover and Brumberg 1982; Fenno 1978; Grose 2011) and are a key component of representation (Clingermayer and Feiock 1994; Grose 2011; Hall 1996; Oliver 2012; Welch and Bledsoe 1988).

In spite of the importance of constituent service to representation, previous studies of the effect of political ambition on representation and responsiveness have focused primarily on how ambition changes the relationship between constituent preferences and the policy actions of public officials (Hall 1996; Maestas 2003). Because policy-oriented behavior is only a portion of

representation, the focus on the relationship between ambition and policy positions shows a woefully incomplete picture of how ambition might affect representation.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we study the relationship between political ambition and local elected officials' responsiveness to constituent requests using an innovative research design. We conduct an audit study of elected public officials using constituent requests and combine the results of that experiment with survey data previously collected from those same officials. While the number of audit studies examining the responsiveness of elected officials is rapidly growing, previous studies have largely used between subject designs and have only examined variation in legislator characteristics using externally measurable factors. (For a more comprehensive summary of previous audit studies of elected officials see Costa 2017.) Our use of a large scale survey in conjunction with an audit study using a within-subject design allows us to measure progressive ambition in a detailed way and observe the relationship between ambition and the responsiveness for a different types of constituent requests.

In this study, we use a within-subject design that looks specifically at how the responsiveness of public officials varies by ambition across two different types of service requests—a standard request for information about a non-electorally related government service and a request for information about an electorally related government service. This allows us to examine differences in how ambition affects these two different types of constituent services. In

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<sup>1</sup> There has been some work linking ambition to constituency services; however, this work is incomplete because it has taken ambition as a constant or has measured ambition using retrospective measures of who runs for office rather than prospective measures looking at who wants to run for higher office (e.g. McAdams and Johannes 1985). Progressive political ambition is not constant across public officials (Dynes et al. 2019; Maestas et al. 2006) and may even vary in response to the opportunities available (Balian and Gasparyan 2017; Fox and Lawless 2011; Maestas et al. 2006), and as such, measuring ambition solely using the decision to run for higher office may limit the ability to draw inferences about the influence of ambition on behavior.

contrast to other research using audit studies, we also perform a detailed content analysis of the responses sent by elected officials. Representation involves both the responsiveness of elected officials and also *the way* in which these officials respond (Grose, Malhotra, and Van Houweling 2015; White, Nathan, and Faller 2015). Moreover, whether and how public officials respond can have significant effects on citizens' political behavior (Butler and Hassell 2018; Panagopoulos 2011). Our analysis provides new understanding about representative communication.

Our findings suggest that progressive ambition has a positive effect on the elected official's responsiveness to electorally oriented service requests. On the whole, when compared to audit studies of state and national US public officials, we find that local officials are generally more responsive to constituent requests for information. However, requests for information about voter registration are even more likely to receive responses than are requests for information about recycling, and these effects appear to be driven by politicians who have interest in running for higher office "if the opportunity presented itself."

Moreover, we also find that officials open to the opportunity to run for higher office are more likely to write longer responses and are more likely to encourage political action in response to emails requesting information about registering to vote than are non-ambitious public officials. However, we do not find evidence that ambition affects the content of elected officials' responses to *non*-electoral service requests. In short, those seeking opportunities to express their political ambitions increases the quality of representation, but only to certain types of constituent services as elected officials act strategically and engage "in political acts...appropriate to gaining (higher) office" (Schlessinger 1966, 6).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> We recognize that progressive ambition among local public officials is also correlated with a number of other characteristics that could also theoretically influence responsiveness (Dynes et al. 2018). As such we also ran models where we analyzed how responsiveness to different

## **Progressive Political Ambition**

The idea that progressive ambition might influence the behavior of elected officials is not a new concept. Although scholars have largely considered variation in higher office seeking behavior to be the result of structural differences in incentives rather than underlying differences in interest in higher office, recent work has shown that underlying political ambition is not a constant trait among all public officials (Dietrich et al. 2012; Dynes, Hassell, and Miles 2019; Maestas 2003). In addition to institutional incentives, a variety factors may also play a role in the ambition that individuals have for higher office. Higher elected office appeals to certain types of individuals whose characteristics and personality traits are more amenable to life in a rough and tumble political environment (Dietrich et al. 2012; Dynes et al. 2019). Underlying interests in seeking higher office also change as a result of the structure of opportunities available to individuals (Maestas et al. 2006).

Differences in ambition are important because they change the incentives for action that politicians have (Schlesinger 1966). Elected officials who are seeking opportunities to express their progressive ambition have incentives to act differently to reach their electoral goals than those without progressive ambition. Specifically, public officials who are interested in seeking opportunities for higher office need to enlarge their electoral base beyond their current electoral coalition to have that opportunity for future political aspirations.

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requests varies by city population size, years in office, local government structure, local office held, and gender. None of the interactions between request type and these characteristics are significant suggesting that the root cause is ambition and not other individual factors that correlate with ambition. Those models are available in the online appendix.

On the other hand, politicians without progressive ambitions do not need to expand their constituent base to continue to win elections.<sup>3</sup> They do not need more votes, but rather need only to service and maintain the electoral constituency they already have. Both those with static ambition (a desire to seek re-election) and those with discrete ambition (a desire to leave office) have already established the electoral base they need to win the office they will subsequently seek. In both cases, these public officials do not need to create new votes, but rather just need to maintain the coalitions they have formed.

Indeed, many elected officials occupy seats where there is a chronic lack of competition (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 2000; Squire 2000), which reduces the chance that their actions will be fully scrutinized during the re-election campaign. This is especially true in local races (Krebs 1998), and our survey of local officials found that 86 percent of elected officials in our sample won their election by more than 5 percentage points and 67 percent of local elected officials won their election by more than 15 percentage points.

Previous research is also consistent with the idea that those most concerned about expanding an electoral constituency are those who harbor progressive ambitions and not those with static ambition. Fenno (1978, 172) does recognize that members of Congress engage in “expansionism” early in their careers; however, Fenno notes that that phase appears to end towards the end of the first term in office. While it could be that elected officials without

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<sup>3</sup> Schlesinger (1966) also discusses how discrete ambition, which is the desire to leave public office, and static ambition, which is the desire to stay in office and run for re-election, might impact behavior. While we focus more on progressive ambition here, previous research indicates that those with static ambition and discrete ambition do not vary significantly in their behavior regarding the monitoring of their own constituents’ opinions, while those with progressive ambition are significantly more attentive to their own constituents’ opinions (Maestas 2003). Our own analysis of the effects of static ambition is also consistent with previous findings. This may be in part due to the lack of expansionism that Fenno (1978) observes among most elected officials after the beginning of the first term in office.

progressive political ambition in their expansionist phase may behave more like elected officials with progressive ambition, given the early transition to a protectionist phase it is unlikely that these individuals are a significant portion of the unambitious. Maestas (2003) specifically finds that state legislators with progressive ambition allocate more resources to following their current constituents' opinions while those with static ambition do not differ significantly in their behavior from those with discrete ambition.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while we should expect local officials without progressive ambition to continue to service their constituencies to maintain their electoral coalitions, they do not need to expand their electoral support in the same way as elected officials who harbor progressive ambitions.

### **Political Ambition and the Behavior of Elected Officials**

The study of how ambition affects representation is not new; yet, this vein of research has focused almost entirely on the behavior of elected representatives in the policy making sphere. We know political ambition influences the policy positions that legislators take (Francis and Kenny 1996; Hibbing 1986), the time and effort elected officials spend on policy activity (Herrick and Moore 1993), and on their attentiveness in listening and seeking to understand the policy preferences of their constituents (Maestas 2003; Parker and Parker 1985). In short, progressive ambition fundamentally changes the way in which legislators act in the policy sphere.

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<sup>4</sup> Moreover, finding evidence of this behavior among current constituents indicates that we should expect these findings to be even larger were the individuals soliciting assistance or information not current constituents but prospective constituents. However, the unlikelihood of prospective constituents reaching out to a representative that is not their own precludes the ability to test such possibilities extensively.

While scholars have long realized that behavior in the legislative and policy related spheres is not the only thing that matters to representation (Fenno 1978), only recently have scholars begun to spend more time investigating the responsiveness of representatives to service requests (e.g. Broockman 2013; Butler and Broockman 2011; Dropp and Peskowitz 2012; Grose et al. 2015) and their communication with constituents (e.g. Butler, Karpowitz, and Pope 2012; Hassell and Monson 2016; Koop 2016). While these studies have focused on the nature and frequency of elected officials' responsiveness to service requests, none of these recent works have examined the relationship between responsiveness and progressive political ambition.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, previous work that considers how progressive ambition might influence constituency service uses measures of ambition that do not account for individual variation in ambition. In the lone instance that we can find that examines the relationship between ambition and constituent services, McAdams and Johannes (1985) find that legislative officials who seek a higher political office in the subsequent election cycle do not allocate constituent service resources differently in the current election cycle than those who do not seek higher office. This lone study, however, relies on a dichotomous variable for the level of ambition and is measured retrospectively by whether the elected official ran for higher office in the subsequent election

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<sup>5</sup> This is likely largely due to a lack of good measures of progressive ambition among elected officials. Dropp and Peskowitz (2012) and Butler et al. (2012) find negative relationships between electoral security and constituent service in an audit study which is consistent with other non-experimental work (Hassell and Monson 2016), but make the assumption that all elected officials share the same ambitions. Moreover, Dropp and Peskowitz (2012) do not differentiate between service requests (which in their case are electorally related) and policy requests (which are not). Butler and his coauthors (2012) do differentiate between policy and service requests and find that responses to policy requests decline with electoral security, but that service requests do not. Costa (2017) uses a meta-analysis and notes no overall difference in responsiveness between policy and service requests but does not differentiate between service requests that are electorally related and those that are not. However, as noted before, none of these studies directly examine any relationship between responsiveness and progressive ambition.



cycle. This fails to distinguish between those who are unambitious, those who have ambition but have not yet found the opportunity, and those who have the ambition and have already laid the groundwork for a run for higher office. Institutional structures and incentives outside of the control of the public official have a strong influence on whether or not that individual runs for office even after accounting for progressive ambition (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1987; Maestas et al. 2006; Rohde 1979). Thus, it is plausible that an individual with only a little ambition may be persuaded to run in a highly favorable district, while another candidate with significantly more desire to run for higher office declines to do so because of unfavorable institutional incentives. As such, this dichotomous measure of ambition eliminates important variation in the progressive ambitions of elected officials and might misclassify ambitious politicians as unambitious. Using a dichotomous variable for the level of ambition may cause researchers to miss important distinctions in ambition which can vary significantly across the population of elected officials (Dynes, Hassell, and Miles 2016; Maestas 2003).

Moreover, McAdams and Johannes (1986) look only at the allocation of congressional resources rather than responsiveness to different types of requests. While there may not be changes in the number of visits home members of Congress makes, or how they allocate staffing resources, elected officials with the need for an opportunity to express their ambition should logically prioritize certain types of constituent services (specifically those in the electoral domain because of their direct impact on the voting constituency) more than others.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As noted previously, significant work has looked at variation in responsiveness to constituent service requests relative to policy requests and how that varies with the electoral security of the representative (Butler et al. 2012; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Hassell and Monson 2016) but not how it varies with progressive ambition.

Here, we argue that politicians should have greater incentives to perform better in areas that help them to achieve their goals. Although previous research has assumed that progressive ambition incentivizes politicians to be more responsive on the whole in hopes of expanding their electoral constituency, this view does not take into considerations how different responsibilities have differing effects on their ability to help them achieve their political goals. In short, the differences between politicians who are seeking to facilitate their progressive ambition and those who are not should be greatest in areas of service that will facilitate opportunities to run for higher office.

Indeed, some forms of constituency service are more likely to produce future electoral opportunities than others. Studies of constituent service that does not differentiate between service requests that are explicitly linked to elections (e.g. registering to vote or acquiring citizenship) and other non-electoral service requests (e.g. assistance with access to government services) may miss important variation in the actions of elected officials. Helping constituents with electorally related services helps add voters to their electorate that they know were not part of it previously, which can help them advance their political ambitions as it grows their potential electoral constituency.

## **Hypotheses**

The preceding discussion leads us to outline a number of expectations for the effect of progressive ambition on constituent service. Given that responses to some constituent service requests have a stronger connection to expanding a public official's electoral base, we expect that the elected officials' responsiveness to different types of constituent service requests will also vary with progressive ambition. Specifically, we hypothesize that progressively ambitious elected officials will be more likely to respond to constituent service requests that have the

potential to increase the electoral base of an elected official, such as a request to help register to vote, than a non-electorally related service request, such as questions about recycling procedures.

Hypothesis 1: Elected officials with progressive ambition will be more likely to be responsive to constituent requests related to electoral participation relative to non-electorally related service requests

We also expect that progressive political ambition will influence *how* elected officials respond to their constituents. Our expectations are that more ambitious elected officials will write longer, more thoughtful, and more encouraging responses to requests for electorally related service. The need to expand an electoral base incentivizes ambitious politicians to provide better responses. We expect that these higher quality responses will be manifest in two ways. First, elected officials with progressive ambition will be more likely to thank constituents for their actions related to voting and to encourage constituents to vote because both expressing gratitude and encouragement to vote have a strong effect on future electoral participation (Panagopoulos 2011).

Hypothesis 2A: Responses by elected officials with progressive ambition to electorally related service requests will be more positive and encouraging in their responses to constituent requests for electorally related service than those without progressive ambition.

Second, we anticipate that ambitious politicians who are seeking to expand their electoral base will give more thorough answers in response to service requests about voting which will lead to longer responses.

Hypothesis 2B: Responses by elected officials with progressive ambition to electorally related service requests will be longer than responses by elected officials without progressive ambition.

In contrast, we do not expect the same effects for non-electoral requests. In these cases, differences between ambitious and non-ambitious politicians should be minimal. Because non-ambitious politicians may still want to retain their seats, we expect them to continue to serve

their districts; however, these non-electoral requests are not as directly tied to ambitious officials' motivations to enlarge and expand their electoral base which results in a level of responsiveness that is not significantly elevated above the responsiveness of unambitious politicians.

Hypothesis 3: Progressive Ambition will have no effect on the content of responses to non-electorally related service requests.

### **Survey of Elected Municipal Officials**

We test these hypotheses with data collected from a field experiment that followed a two-wave survey of municipal officials in 2016.<sup>7</sup> Invitations to the first wave of the survey were sent in May and June of 2016 to a sample of 27,862 elected mayors and legislators (e.g., city councilors, aldermen, supervisors, etc.) and high ranking staff (such as city managers and clerks) from 4,187 cities. Given the focus of this study, we exclude non-elected staff from the analysis. The sample was compiled by a for-profit organization that gathers contact information and email addresses of public officials from municipalities that have a website and a population above 10,000. The organization uses webcrawler software to identify when information changes on the contact pages of each city's website and then has research assistants update its contact list of officials accordingly. Unfortunately, this approach had a high error rate. Based on Qualtrics' email tracking, only 18,531 (or 67%) of the email invitations were delivered to an active email address. In addition, we looked up a sample of 832 officials in the list and found that only 44% of the email addresses were accurate. 2,003 officials answered questions on the first wave of the survey, resulting in a response rate of 16.4 percent,<sup>8</sup> which is similar to those from other surveys of municipal officials (e.g., Butler and Dynes (2016) report a response rate of 23%).

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<sup>7</sup> This research project was approved by IRBs at [redacted].

<sup>8</sup> The 17.8% is calculated as follows:  $2,165 / (.4375 * 27,862)$ .

The second wave of the survey was conducted in June and early July of 2016. The sample consisted of the email addresses of elected mayors and city councilors (or equivalent) gathered previously in 2012 and 2014. Excluding the email addresses that were also in the first wave resulted in a list of an additional 29,250 emails. The email addresses collected in 2012 were gathered in January through March of 2012 by a team of undergraduate research assistants who searched for the website of 26,566 US municipalities. The email addresses collected in 2014 were gathered in a similar fashion in early 2014 but excluded municipalities with a population below 3,000 due to the low percentage of small towns with websites. Given that these email addresses were gathered 2 to 4 years prior to this survey, we knew that a large percentage of the emails and names of the officials (in the case of cities that use generic email accounts for each office) would no longer be accurate. Indeed, 26% of the emails sent through Qualtrics were undeliverable. It is likely that many more of the email addresses are no longer monitored though they remain active. With 1,418 officials participating, the response rate for the second round of the survey was 6.6% although that probably underestimates significantly the actual response rate.<sup>9</sup> In this paper, we analyze respondents from both survey rounds together.

An analysis of the respondents and sampling frame show that the officials who participated in the survey come from a wide variety of municipalities in terms of location, demographics, and institutional features. The survey also asked municipal officials about a wide range of items related to their political position. The officials in our sample vary significantly on many important political characteristics, including partisan identity, self-placed ideology, gender,

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<sup>9</sup> The 6.6% is calculated as follows:  $1,418 / (29,250 - 7,653)$ . The 7,653 emails are those that bounced.

term limits, partisan status of elections, electoral vulnerability, tenure, and expressed views on representation. For more details about the sample, please see the online appendix.

The primary independent variable in this analysis is local officials’ progressive ambition, which we measured by asking elected officials, “Which best characterizes your attitudes toward running for a higher office in the future?”<sup>10</sup> Survey respondents had four options, which we list in Table 1, beginning with the answer that indicates the highest level of progressive ambition.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1: Progressive Ambition among Surveyed Municipal Officials**

Attitudes Toward Running for Higher Office	Frequency Choosing Each Attitude	Percent Choosing Each Attitude
1) Definitely: “It is something I definitely would like to undertake in the future.”	285	13%
2) Opportunity: “It is something I might undertake if the opportunity presented itself.”	579	27%
3) No Interest: “I would not rule it out forever, but I currently have no interest.”	914	43%
4) Never: “It is something I would absolutely never do.”	363	17%
TOTAL	2,141	100%

In addition, to obtain a measure of static ambition, we asked respondents to indicate how many more years they planned on remaining in office. Consistent with Maestas (2003) we coded

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<sup>10</sup> It is possible that individuals with ambition might be unwilling to express it on a survey (even though confidentiality was assured). This, however, would bias our measure of ambition downwards and make it more difficult to detect effects. We consider it unlikely that individuals would have social pressure to express more ambition, the much higher likelihood is that elected officials do not want to appear to be focused on a run for higher office rather than on their current responsibilities.

<sup>11</sup> 2,806 elected mayors and city councilors (or equivalent) were included in the audit study (while we received 3,421 responses to the survey, we intentionally excluded non-elected city staff from the audit study and unintentionally made a small error in compiling email addresses that caused us to omit a small number who had completed the survey). The analyses only include those individuals included in the audit study who answered the ambition question in the survey.

individuals who indicated they would be in office six or more years as having static ambition. Just over 60% of the sample reported anticipating being in office for more than six years.<sup>12</sup>

One potential problem we recognize is that progressive political ambition is not randomly assigned. Elected local officials who harbor progressive ambitions are substantively distinct from non-ambitious political officials in a number of ways (Dynes et al. 2018; Maestas et al. 2006) many of which could also potentially influence responsiveness to citizen requests for services. As a result, we also run models that interact a variety of characteristics that correlate with ambition including individual personality traits, city size, years in office, local government structure, gender, and personality.

None of the interactions of these variables with the experimental treatments outlined below are significant predictors of differences in responsiveness or differences in the content of the email responses to different requests, nor is this unexpected. While these characteristics might affect overall responsiveness, we should not expect responsiveness to different types of service requests to vary by these characteristics.<sup>13</sup> These results are available in the online appendix. While we are obviously not able to test every possible factor, these null results contrasted with the findings detailed in the text provide strong assurances that the root cause of variations in responsiveness detailed here is ambition and not factors that correlate with ambition.

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<sup>12</sup> In our sample, the correlation between static ambition and progressive ambition is 0.07.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, a model without elected official fixed effects (which subsume the coefficient for the characteristics of the municipality and legislator) shows that each of these characteristics is correlated with responsiveness.

## Email Audit Experiment

Using a list of generic first and last names, we created ten (five male, five female) Gmail accounts from which we sent requests to the officials who had previously participated in our survey.<sup>14</sup> We utilize a three-wave within person design for this experiment. Each elected official received two emails requesting assistance in gathering information sent during one of three waves.<sup>15</sup> One of these two service oriented emails asked for assistance finding information about an electorally related topic (information about how long an individual needed to live in an area prior to registering to vote) while the other asked for assistance with a non-electorally related topic (information about what could and could not be recycled in the community). The exact text for these specific treatments and the rest of the email is displayed in Box 1. In Figure 1, we provide an example of how the emails looked like in Gmail, and how the randomization created distinct emails that would minimize suspicion that they were sent by a fictitious individual as part of a study.

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<sup>14</sup> The accounts were created with the names: Amy Bennett, Andrea Davis, Ann Thomas, Eric Bennett, Jason Anderson, Joshua Wood, Melissa Wood, Michael Davis, Tiffany Anderson, and Will Thomas. In other work, we also looked at the effect of gender on the responsiveness of male and female elected officials. We found no effect of gender of the constituent on the responsiveness of elected officials, nor were public officials more responsive to constituents who share their gender.

<sup>15</sup> Public officials also received a third email regarding a policy related issue which we do not analyze here.



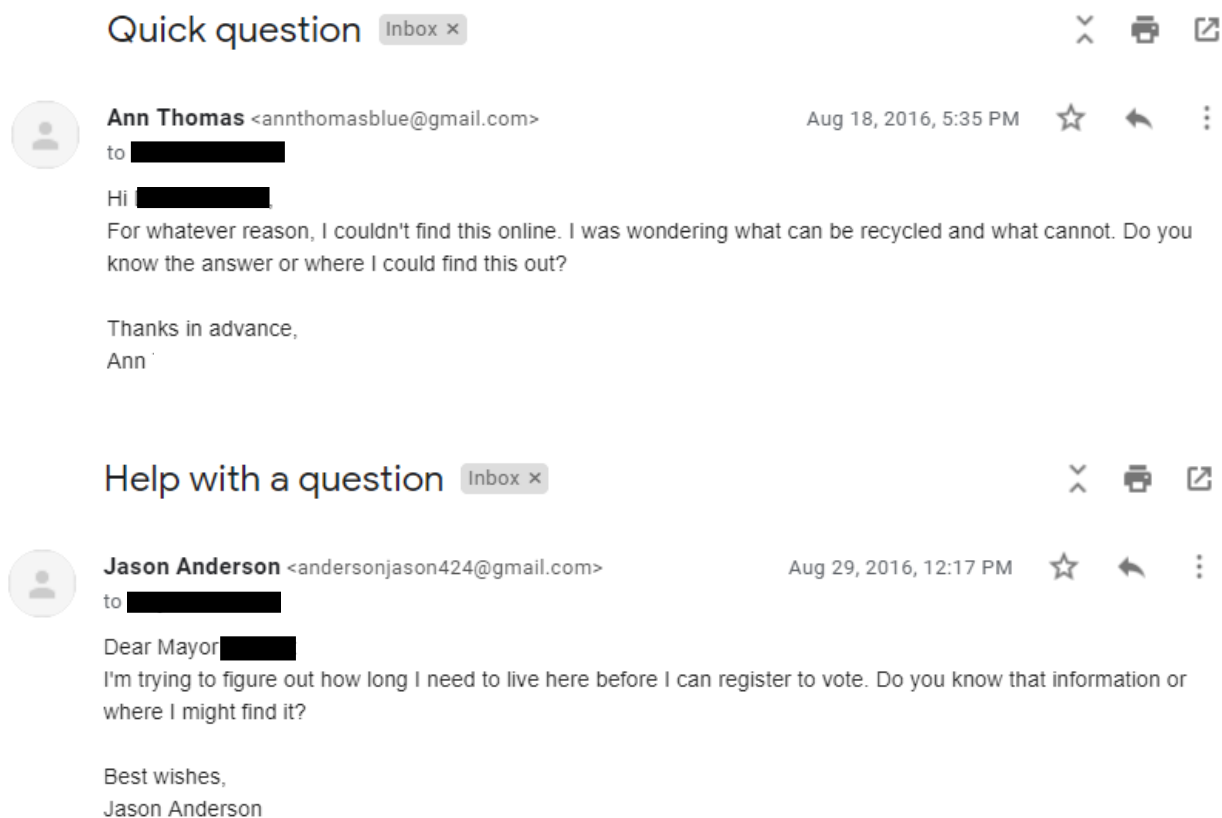
## Box 1: Email Treatment Text

<b>Subject:</b>	Quick Question / Help with a question / Request for Assistance
<b>Salutation:</b>	[BLANK] / Hello / Hi / Dear
<b>Recipient's Name:</b>	[BLANK] / [TITLE] [LASTNAME] / [FIRSTNAME LASTNAME]
<b>Punctuation:</b>	[BLANK] / : / ,
<b>Introduction:</b>	[BLANK] / For whatever reason, I couldn't find this online. / I've been in the area a little while, but / I'm newer to the area and
<b>Segue:</b>	I'm trying to figure out / I was wondering if you could help me figure out / I wanted to know / I was wondering / I was wondering if you could tell me
<b>Recycling Service Treatment:</b>	what can be recycled and what cannot. Do you know [that information or where I might find it / the answer or where I could find this out]?
<b>Voter Registration Service Treatment:</b>	how long I need to live here before I can register to vote. Do you know [the answer or where I could find this out / that information or where I might find it]?
<b>Valediction:</b>	[BLANK] / Thanks, / Best wishes, / Sincerely, / Thanks for considering this request, / Regards, / Best, / Thanks in advance, / I appreciate the help,
<b>Sender's Name:</b>	Amy / Amy Bennett / Andrea / Andrea Davis / Ann / Ann Thomas / Eric / Eric Bennett / Jason / Jason Anderson / Joshua / Joshua Wood / Melissa / Melissa Wood / Michael / Michael Davis / Tiffany / Tiffany Anderson / Will / Will Thomas
<b>Sender's Email Address:</b>	andersonjason424@gmail.com / andersontiffany424@gmail.com / annthomas.blue@gmail.com / bennett.amy149@gmail.com / davisandrea.aac@gmail.com / davismichael.aac@gmail.com / ebennett5661@gmail.com / willthomas.blue@gmail.com / woodjoshua.93@gmail.com / woodmelissa93@gmail.com

*Notes:* The above is the text used to create the emails sent to the elected municipal officials in the email audit study. Figure 1 shows an actual email sent using the text above. Assignment to the different conditions were not completely independent of the other conditions in the following cases: 1) Every official received two service request emails, one about recycling and one about registering to vote (and a third email with a request for the elected officials position on a policy which we do not analyze here) 2) The email addresses were associated with a specific sender's name. 3) No official received more than 1 email from senders with the same last name (there are five last names among the senders and associated email addresses and a male and female first name associated with each last name.)

One concern might be that public officials might become suspicious about the nature of these requests. For this purpose, we tried to make the emails as different as possible by randomizing every part of the request. While we made the language of the specific request similar to increase the validity of the treatment, every other aspect of the email was randomly varied, creating unique and distinct emails (see Figure 1 for examples). We randomized the order in which each of the emails assigned to an official was sent. To avoid possible contamination effects, we waited at least one week in between sending each wave of the emails to each of the 2,141 elected municipal officials for whom we had data on their political ambition.

**Figure 1: Examples of Email Requests**



We are confident that this randomization effectively worked and that public officials did not independently suspect that this was an audit experiment because we did not see a decrease

(or an increase) in the response rate over time. The average response rate for the first wave was 67.4% and the final wave was 66.6%.<sup>16</sup> The fact that there was no significant or substantive difference in the rate of response indicates to us that public officials did not discern these requests to be a part of a larger research study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Although federal ethics guidelines classify research involving elected officials as subjects as exempt from Institutional Review Board review requirements (and indeed, the two IRBs to which we submitted both agreed on this point and ruled the research exempt), we detail here some ethical concerns we think warranted consideration in the implementation of this research design. As audit studies have become a more utilized method in the social scientist research toolbox, we need to consider the costs of such designs relative to the benefits they provide.

In using this tool, we should think about a couple of ethical considerations. The first of these is the use of deception combined with the lack of informed consent. In our experiment we used fictitious aliases when contacting city officials. The need to measure actual behavior (which may be significantly different from stated behavior measured from survey experiments when stated behaviors might be influenced by social norms (Berinsky 1999)) and the large number of municipalities in the study necessitates the use of fictitious aliases. Such a design to measure the responsiveness to constituent requests (and how they vary by elected official ambition) in such a large number of municipalities could not feasibly be carried out without the use of fictitious

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<sup>16</sup> The response rate to the middle wave was 60.4%, but we suspect that is likely because it was sent on Saturday whereas the other waves were sent on a weekday.

alias. The benefit of understanding how ambition affects actual behaviors provides the motivation for using such a research method.

The key to the acceptability of the use of deception, however, is whether the benefits of the knowledge accrued through the use of deception outweigh the harm done to the subjects or to others through the use of deception. Although it is possible to imagine situations where experimental deception might cause psychological or physical harm to participation or others, we felt that, with the proper cautions used to maintain respondent anonymity so as to not harm the reputation of any participant, individual harm was limited to the normal frustrations that public officials might have when dealing with constituents.

Beyond individual harm, it is important to also consider the burden placed on public officials and possible downstream effects. Given the necessity of seeing how public officials choose to respond and to spend time and effort, which is the best way to understand their priorities (Hall 1996), some burden is necessary. At the same time, it is important to try to limit the work load imposed on these public officials. While we needed electoral and non-electoral topics, we attempted to identify topics that would be relatively easy to respond to. The length of response from officials (around 50 words) and the difficulty of acquiring the information to respond to our request is in line with other low cost audit experiments (e.g. Butler and Broockman 2011). Given the norms of acceptable requests that have been established, we did not feel these requests were overburdening or even more time consuming or out of the range of what would normally be expected of a public official (see Oliver (2012) Chapter 7 for more details).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Oliver begins this chapter with a quote from a local politician about constituent services that emphasizes the local nature of local constituent services. "You want to know what politics is? I'll tell you what it is. It's when you get a phone call at 12:30 in the night and one of your constituents calls up and says 'you get your ass over here and move this dog shit off my lawn.'" - Wilma Goldstein, "Vote for Me: Politics in America"

There is also the question of whether the total time spent collectively by public officials might impede their responsiveness to the public in general. We do recognize that the number of requests sent to about 2,800 public officials may result in what seems like a substantive amount of time. However, even here, we tried to minimize the potential influence it would have on the ability to respond to constituents. We specifically did not contact public officials for whom we did not have a survey response. Although we had working email addresses for 40,128 public officials, we only conducted the audit experiment on 2,806 (a number we believed would provide sufficient power necessary based on previous studies). On the whole, we estimate that our audit experiment went to about 1.6% of local public officials in the United States (a representative sample (see the online appendix), but a small sample nonetheless).<sup>18</sup> Thus, while the time volume may appear large, when put into context, it is not nor is it likely that our requests had any substantive effect on the behavior of public officials generally or the provision of services to constituents.

Lastly, we also recognize that audit studies might change the behavior of public officials as they become more sensitized to the possibility that they are being studied which may cause them to ignore or disregard genuine requests for assistance and information. Although the number of emails we sent might increase that risk, as we mentioned previously, we went to great lengths to randomize every possible part of the request to minimize the likelihood of detection. The consistency in the response rates (and the high level of responsiveness) of the local public

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<sup>18</sup> With an estimated 35,000 city and town governments in the U.S. (as of the 2012 census) each with approximately 5 councilors, the total population of local elected officials is approximately 175,000 (not including county governments). The 2,806 contacted thus represents about 1.6% of that population.

officials across the three waves of the survey strongly suggests to us that this randomization and staggered distribution was successful.

## **Results**

Our findings indicate that municipal officials overall are responsive to email requests. As reported in Table 2, elected municipal officials responded to 70.8% of the voter registration email messages they received and 67.4% of the recycling email messages they received. Both of these response rates are significantly higher than reported response rates to constituent letters at the Congressional and state legislative levels.<sup>19</sup>

In Table 2 we show tests for whether the different email request treatment conditions affected local officials' response rates. As we indicated previously, we sent officials two different service requests, one with no electoral content (dealing with recycling) and one with more electoral significance (dealing with voter registration). On the whole, as expected, we find that officials are more likely to respond to voter registration email requests than to the non-electoral service request by 3.4 percentage points ( $p < .01$ ).

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<sup>19</sup> For example, meta-analysis of other audit studies suggests that all public officials respond on average at a rate of 53% (but includes a range from 19% to around 80% response rate) (Costa 2017). However, we believe the local nature of local public officials makes it likely that local officials are more responsive than state or federal officials. Our results are slightly higher than the response rate of the one other study of local elected officials which examined only the responses of elected officials from large cities (Butler and Crabtree 2017). Part of the reason for the higher response rate may be that these were elected officials who had also previously responded to another survey.

**Table 2: Do local officials' response rates differ based on the email request treatments?**

Email Request Treatment:	Voter		Difference
	Registration	Recycling	
Response Rate	70.8%	67.4%	3.4
95% C.I.	(68.8, 72.7)	(65.4, 69.3)	(0.6, 6.2)
Obs.	2,141	2,141	

To examine the role of progressive ambition in the differences in response rates found above, we now test whether progressively ambitious officials are more likely to respond to service requests that have a direct impact on their electoral goals. We begin by presenting predicted mean response rates to the different email treatments by the officials' progressive ambition in Figure 2. To mitigate possible bias caused by omitted variables that may correlate with officials' progressive ambition and propensity to respond to emails generally, we take advantage of the within-subjects design of our experiment and use a subject-level fixed effects model to estimate response rates and how they differ between the treatment conditions (see Table 3). This allows us to account for a myriad of individually constant factors that might also affect the behavior and responsiveness of elected officials including gender, city and staff size, electoral security, and time in office.<sup>20</sup>

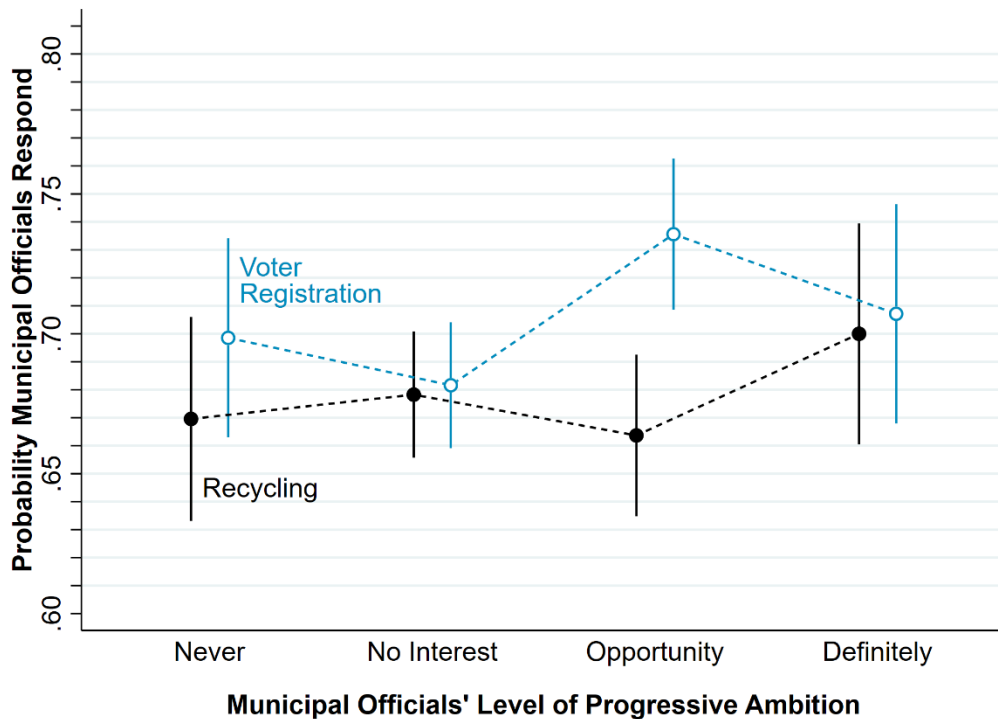
In Figure 2 we show the probability that elected officials responds to the recycling service request (solid point estimates) or voter registration one (hollow point estimates) from the estimates generated from Table 3. We find that elected officials are more likely to respond to emails about voter registration than recycling, but this difference is largest and only statistically

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<sup>20</sup> This does not eliminate the possibility of spurious correlation as ambition is not randomly assigned and correlates with a number of factors that might also increase responsiveness. However, as we note elsewhere, we also analyzed other factors that have been shown to correlate with political ambition. Those results are available in the online appendix. None of the results are significant, and the incorporation of these additional interactions does not affect the results presented here.

significant among officials who express interest in running “if the opportunity presented itself” (diff. = 7.3;  $p < 0.001$ ), consistent with Hypothesis 1. Though elected officials who were “definitely” interested in running for higher office had the second highest response rate to the voter registration emails, they also had the highest response rate to the recycling emails, resulting in a small difference in response rates between the two treatments (diff. = 0.6;  $p = 0.439$ ).

**Figure 2: Probability of Response by Email Topic and Progressive Ambition**



*Notes:* Points are the predicted probability of the municipal official responding to either the Voter Registration (hollow) or Recycling (solid) email based on column (2) in Table 3. Bars are the 85% confidence intervals, which indicate statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level when the confidence intervals do not overlap (e.g., Maghsoodloo and Huang 2010).



**Table 3: Difference-in-Differences Estimate of Response Rates by Email Topic and Progressive Ambition**

	(1)	(2)
Voter Registration Treatment	0.073 [0.022] p=0.001	0.071 [0.027] p=0.005
Definitely * Voter Registration	-0.062 [0.040] p=0.055	-0.065 [0.040] p=0.050
No Interest * Voter Registration	-0.065 [0.029] p=0.012	-0.069 [0.029] p=0.010
Never * Voter Registration	-0.045 [0.035] p=0.101	-0.043 [0.036] p=0.113
Static Ambition * Voter Registration		0.002 [0.025] p=0.464
Constant	0.672 [0.006] p=0.000	0.676 [0.006] p=0.000
Observations	4,146	4,146
Number of fixed effects	2,073	2,073
R-squared (within)	0.005	0.005

*Notes:* Table displays coefficients from a linear probability model with fixed effects at the subject-level where dependent variable is *Responded to Email*, which is an indicator variable that equals 1 if the municipal official responded to our email and 0 otherwise. The baseline conditions are the recycling treatment and subjects who indicated an interest in running for higher office “if the opportunity presented itself.” The coefficients on the indicator variables for the different levels or progressive ambition are omitted because these independent variables are subsumed in the subject-level fixed effects. We do not use a logit or probit model with fixed effects because they can produce biased estimates due to the incidental parameters problem. This is especially a concern in models with fewer than 15 observations per fixed effect (Katz 2001). In this analysis, we have just two. Standard errors are shown in brackets and clustered by municipal official. One-tailed p-values are shown under the standard errors.

In Table 3, we examine the difference-in-differences of responses to different service requests across levels of progressive ambition, using an OLS regression with fixed effects that interacts the officials' level of progressive ambition with the treatment assignment. We also include a measure of static ambition in our model interacted with the email type to test the impact of static ambition. Since officials who expressed interest in running "if the opportunity presented itself" had the largest difference in response rates between the two treatment conditions, we use this as the baseline category.

On the whole, we find that the large difference in response rates among those who were interested in running "if the opportunity presented itself" is statistically significant from the difference in response rates among those who expressed either no interest or that they would definitely run. The difference-in-differences also approaches statistical significance at the 0.1 level when comparing those who were interested "if the opportunity presented itself" to those who indicated running for office is something they would "absolutely never do." Though these heterogeneous treatment effects are not substantively huge, they are similar in size to the effect of emailers' race on elected officials' response rates as found by Butler and Broockman (2011), in which white state legislators were about 7 percentage points less likely to respond to emails sent by someone with a black name.

We also find no significant effect of static ambition. Consistent with the idea that elected officials with static ambition merely need to service their constituency rather than actively work to expand their electoral constituency, we see no significant difference in the responsiveness of those with static ambition to different types of requests. While static ambition might affect overall responsiveness, it does not appear to have a significant effect on differences in responsiveness to electoral and non-electoral service requests.

Our findings suggest that progressive political ambition influences responsiveness constituency requests consistent with our expectations as laid out in Hypothesis 1. However, while we find significant differences in the responsiveness to electoral and non-electoral service requests by those who express interest in running for higher office “if the opportunity presented itself” we do not find a similar difference between those who are definitely running for higher office, although that lack of difference appears primarily to be due to an elevated response rate to both electoral and non-electoral service requests rather than a lower responsiveness to electoral service requests.

Although we do not definitively know what drives these results, including the possibility that they may be a statistical oddity, there are a couple of possible explanations. The first is that those with the highest level of ambition are just more responsive overall. Indeed, Figure 2 suggests that this may be the case. High levels of ambition could cause those individual to respond at higher levels regardless of the content with hopes of expanding their electoral constituency in any way they can.

Alternatively, there may also be differences in the approaches of those who have interest in higher office but do not yet see the opportunity and those who are “definitely” interested in running for higher office. Ambition is not static (Balian and Gasparyan 2017; Fox and Lawless 2011), and ambition increases as opportunities and pathways to higher office become more salient (Balian and Gasparyan 2017; Maestas et al. 2006; Schlesinger 1991). Those who are “definitely” interested in running for higher office are those who are more likely to have already laid the ground work for such actions including the electoral foundations needed for higher office (Balian and Gasparyan 2017; Maestas et al. 2006).

On the other hand, those who are interested but who do not see a clear path will express interest but be less likely to indicate they are “definitely” running in the future. Simply, survey measures of ambition can be understood at least partially as a “response to the possibilities that lie before politicians” (Schlesinger 1991, 38). As such, the differences in behavior between those who would be interested “if the opportunity presented itself” and those who are “definitely” interested in running might be the result of the need to create opportunities. Those who are “definitely” interested in running might be more likely already to have laid the electoral groundwork for a run (Balian and Gasparyan 2017; Fox and Lawless 2011). In contrast, those who are interested in higher office “if the opportunity presented itself” might be less likely to have already created that constituency that would allow them to run, which is why they do not indicate they are “definitely” going to run (Balian and Gasparyan 2017; Maestas et al. 2006; Schlesinger 1991). The differences in the opportunities before these ambitious politicians may also shape their behavior. One possibility is that those who have ambition “if the opportunity presented itself” may be more responsive to the opportunities that present themselves.<sup>21</sup>

### **Length of Response**

Although there are differences in response rates, we can be more confident these effects are driven by ambition because of how ambition also affects the way in which elected officials respond. We start by examining the overall length of responses from ambitious and non-ambitious public officials. We measured the length of the responses from elected officials in two

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<sup>21</sup> Another possibility is that those who answer “definitely” are just more overconfident in their likelihood of running (and also more likely to underperform at constituent service). However, given that the lack of effects is largely due to the increase in the responsiveness to non-electoral service requests, we think this is unlikely.

steps. First, we employed research assistants to go through each email message and remove headers and other superfluous information, other than the email text from the municipal official. Next, we used software to generate a word count for each email message.<sup>22</sup> To mitigate concerns of post-treatment bias (Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres 2018), we follow Coppock’s (2018) recommendations and set the word count of non-responses to zero rather than consider them missing.<sup>23</sup> We fit both a fixed effects model (similar to the one used in Table 3) and a zero-inflated negative binomial regression model predicting the word count by the interaction of progressive ambition and the topic of the email. The full model results are in the appendix.

Progressively ambitious elected officials write more words in response to electoral service requests than are non-ambitious elected officials. As noted in Table A.7 in the online appendix, those who express an interest in running “if the opportunity presented itself” or will “definitely” run write 55 and 49 words on average in their responses while those who will never run or currently have no interest wrote 41 and 42 words on average. On average, ambitious politicians write a sentence worth of words more. In contrast, we do not see as strong of a trend across ambition for requests for information about recycling, where the average word counts from the least to the most ambitious are 46, 47, 54, and 47. Though the differences-in-differences are not quite statistically significant (see Tables A.7 and A.8 in the appendix), they are in the right direction in line with Hypothesis 2B.

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<sup>22</sup> We went through each of the email responses and cleaned up the text to ensure that the word counts are accurate.

<sup>23</sup> Results are very similar if we exclude non-responses from the analysis. The primary difference is that the word count is on average about 60 words higher across all treatment conditions.

## Response Content

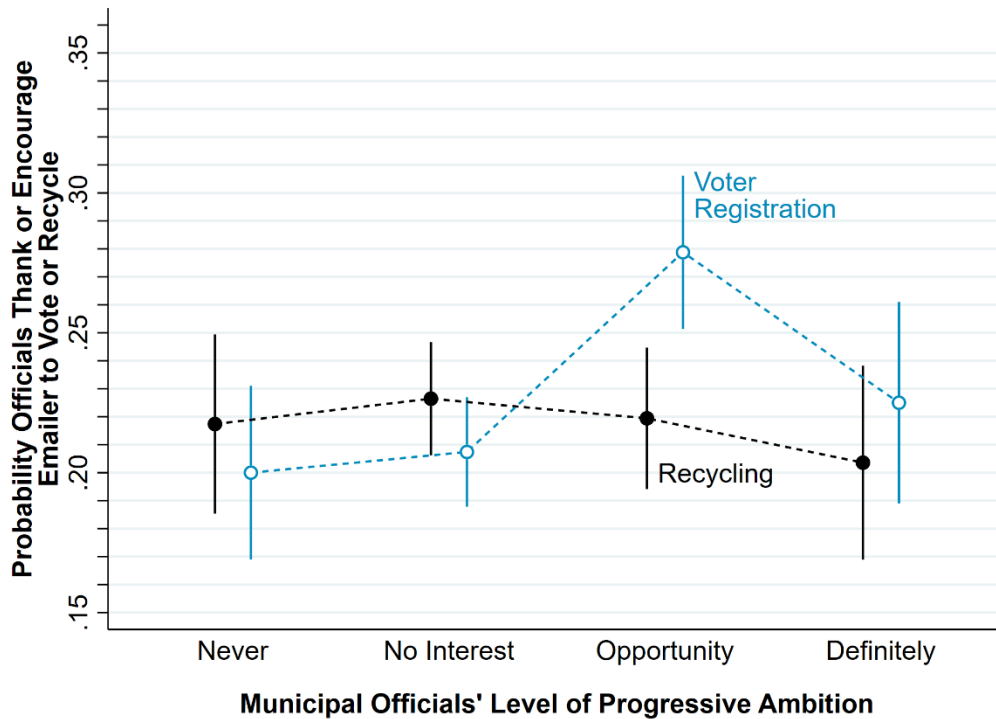
The length of a response to a request for service, however, does not provide a clear indicator of the overall quality of those responses. To better test the hypothesis that ambitious politicians will craft better and more thoughtful responses to electoral related service requests than non-ambitious politicians, we need to know whether the content of those messages varies. As outlined in Hypothesis 2A, we argue that ambitious politicians are more likely to encourage their constituents to vote and to express gratitude for their interest in voting compared to their propensity for doing so in their responses to recycling inquiries. The results presented here provide strong support for these expectations.

To test Hypothesis 2A, we employed a research assistant to read every single email response and dichotomously code whether the email encouraged the respondent to either vote or register to vote, encouraged the respondent to recycle, thanked the constituent for their interest in voting, or thanked the constituent for their interest in recycling. While one research assistant was coding the entire corpus of email responses, several undergraduates were randomly assigned a set of 700 emails to code for the presence of gratitude or encouragement. The coding was double-blind. None of the coders were aware of the topic of the research project and none of them knew who had been assigned to code other sets of emails. Intercoder agreement for the items presented here was 83 and 84.5% and the Cronbach's alpha was .65, each of which meet dominant thresholds for intercoder reliability (McHugh 2012). We had at least three coders code each message, and we use a majority rule to create our dichotomous measure.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Complete information on the email coding process is available in the online appendix.

**Figure 3: Probability that Municipal Officials Thank or Encourage Constituent to Vote or Recycle by Email Topic and Progressive Ambition**



*Notes:* Points are the predicted probability of the municipal official encouraging or thanking an emailer with regards to voting or recycling in response to Voter Registration (hollow) or Recycling (solid) email based on column (2) in Table 4. Bars are the 85% confidence intervals, which indicate statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level when the confidence intervals do not overlap (e.g., Maghsoodloo and Huang 2010).

Figure 3 examines whether ambitious municipal officials are more likely to thank or encourage constituents in their response to inquiries about voter registration than about recycling. These point estimates are derived from Table 4. In Table 4, we further examine whether the difference-in-differences in the content of elected officials’ responses vary by different levels of progressive ambition. Once again, to account for possible omitted variable bias, the results in Table 4 are from a linear probability model with subject-level fixed effects that take advantage of the within-subjects design of our experiment. Employing a fixed effects model allows us to account for any time-invariant subject-level variables such as perceived

opportunities to run for higher office, staff size, electoral security, and time in office that might also correlate with progressive ambition and the content of elected officials' email responses.<sup>25</sup>

As before, we also include a measure of static ambition interacted with the message type.

Similar to the results in Figure 2, those open to the opportunity to run for higher office are much more likely than elected officials without progressive ambition to thank constituents for voting or encourage constituents to vote in response to a voter registration email. Not only are these differences statistically significant, they are substantively meaningful. While 21% of officials who say they “never” plan to run thank constituents for inquiring about registering to vote or encourage them to vote, this number stands at 28% among opportunistically ambitious elected officials. Comparing this to the probability that an opportunistically ambitious elected official will do the same in response to an email about recycling (22%) suggests that municipal officials seeking opportunities to run for higher office respond differently to constituents who are signaling an interest in voting. These effects are not merely the result of ambitious public officials being a more gracious type since we do not find a similar effect on encouraging or thanking constituents about recycling in response to a recycling related service request.

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<sup>25</sup> Again, while ambition is not randomly assigned, interactions of other variables with constituent request type do not produce significant results as we outlined previously and in the section that follows.



**Table 4: The Influence of Progressive Ambition on the Language Used in Constituent Requests**

	(1)	(2)
Topic = Voter Registration	-0.017 [0.030] p=0.780	-0.004 [0.033] p=0.952
Definitely * Voter Registration	0.039 [0.046] p=0.200	0.043 [0.046] p=0.174
Opportunity * Voter Registration	0.077 [0.039] p=0.026	0.079 [0.039] p=0.022
No Interest * Voter Registration	-0.002 [0.036] p=0.982	0.001 [0.036] p=0.987
Static Ambition * Voter Registration		-0.027 [0.026] p=0.653
Constant	0.220 [0.006] p=0.00	0.220 [0.006] p=0.000
Observations	4,146	4,146
Number of fixed effects	2,073	2,073
R-squared (within)	0.004	0.004

*Notes:* Table displays coefficients from a linear probability model with fixed effects at the subject-level. DV is an indicator variable that equals 1 if the municipal official thanked or encouraged voting or recycling in the email response and 0 otherwise. We count non-responses as 0's, consistent with Coppock's (2018) recommendation to avoid post treatment conditioning. The baseline conditions are the recycling treatment and subjects who indicated they would "Never" run for higher office. The coefficients on the indicator variables for the different levels or progressive ambition are omitted because these independent variables are subsumed in the subject-level fixed effects. We avoid using logit and probit models due to the incidental parameters problem (Katz 2001). Standard errors are shown in brackets and clustered by each individual municipal official. One-tailed p-values are shown under the standard errors.

Overall, these results show that ambition has an effect on both the likelihood of response and the content of those responses. Municipal officials who lack interest in running for higher office include fewer words in their responses to voter registration requests than those with progressive ambition. Publicly elected municipal officials with ambition for higher office are also more likely to express gratitude and encouragement to their constituents for voting and registering to vote in a way that non-ambitious elected officials do not. Consistent with expectations, these effects are greatest for those who express an interest in running “if the opportunity presented itself.” Moreover, we do not see these same differences for non-electoral related requests for information about recycling.

### **Robustness Checks: Other Possible Characteristics?**

As mentioned previously, one possible concern with this analysis is that by restricting our analysis to ambition and ignoring the fact that ambition is correlated to a number of other individual and institutional characteristics (Black 1972; Dietrich et al. 2012; Dynes et al. 2019), we may be finding correlations between ambition and responsiveness that are spurious rather than causal. We readily admit that ambition is not randomly assigned nor are we experimentally increasing ambition. For instance, larger cities are more likely to attract individuals to run for city office with professional goals that include higher office (Oliver 2012) and those same cities are also more likely to have an institutionalized system that facilitates better responses to constituent requests, or that individuals with certain traits and characteristics are both more likely to have ambition and more likely to be responsive to constituent requests. To test these possible spurious relationships, we also analyzed other individual characteristics and institutional factors. The results of the analysis, which can be found in the Online Appendix (Tables A.10 through A.19), demonstrate that none of these factors are substantively or statistically significant.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Our evidence shows that progressive ambition of a certain type can increase responsiveness in line with officials' electoral goals. Specifically, we find that elected officials who are open to running take advantage of opportunities to broaden their electoral base, which they can use in seeking higher office. Accordingly, they respond differently to different types of requests from constituents for service. Progressive political ambitions create an incentive for elected officials to be more responsive to the needs and requests of constituents in areas that help them achieve their electoral goals.

Our results suggest, however, that ambition is most effective when local officials are interested in running for higher office "if the opportunity presents itself." While we cannot test the mechanism explicitly, we think that because of their ambitions and the need to create a larger political base to support a run for higher office, elected officials who would run for office "if the opportunity presented itself" may be more likely to take advantage of opportunities that do arise to broaden their political base. These politicians want to encourage new voters to register to give them the best opportunity to seek higher office. As such, service requests from constituents related to the electoral process elicit different responses depending on the electoral goals of the elected official.

In addition, we also find that harboring progressive political ambition affects the way that electoral officials frame their responses in their communications with constituents. The more ambitious the local official, the more likely they are to thank their constituents for expressing an interest in voting or encourage them to vote. Given the strong impact of communications from politician on the behaviors of constituents (Broockman and Butler 2016; Bullock 2011; Butler and Hassell 2018), these small gestures of thanks and encouragements not only reflect well on

the ambitious politician but could also have a significant effect on future voter participation (Panagopoulos 2011).

These findings have several significant implications for our understanding of how to improve representation. The first is that progressive ambition is an important motivator for better constituency service and representation. As mentioned, elected officials open to running for higher office are more responsive to electorally related service requests and are more encouraging and gracious in their responses than those without political progressive ambition. Those who desire to move up appear to respond to the incentives to provide better service in order to facilitate the reaching of their goals.

On the other hand, we should not rely on ambition as a means to increase service representation across the board. While progressive ambition increases responsiveness to the narrow spectrum of electorally related service requests, it does not appear to make elected officials more responsive overall to all requests for constituent services. Ambition itself (either static nor progressive) appears to be insufficient to increase the responsiveness (and the quality thereof) from public officials to requests outside of electorally related affairs.

On the whole, however, we do find that municipal officials, whether politically ambitious or not, are highly responsive and generally appear more responsive to their constituents than other elected officials at other levels of government. The 71% and 68% response rates to the electoral and non-electoral service requests compare much more favorably to the 52% and 51% response rates of members of Congress and state legislators, respectively (Costa 2017). In that sense, local elected officials are doing an excellent job serving their constituents. However, elected officials open to running for higher office are opportunistic and seize the chances presented to create the appropriate conditions to allow a run for higher office; which is why they

are the most likely to encourage a new voter in the area to register. From this we conclude that ambition is one of many motivations that influence how responsive municipal officials are to electorally related constituent requests.

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