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Candidate emergence as movement mobilization: An analysis of Women's post-2016 electoral engagement

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Abstract

Political science scholarship argues that women's under-representation in American politics stems from a persistent shortage of female candidates. Women are less likely to run because they often perceive individual and structural obstacles that negatively impact their electoral interest. Such barriers remain intact, yet thousands of women have signaled their interest in running for office since the 2016 election by participating in candidate training programs (CTPs). Though running for office is not commonly defined as an activist activity, this article argues that theories of collective action and movement mobilization, rather than those focusing on the psychological aspects of candidate emergence, are better equipped to explain the recent increase of electoral interest. Using EMILY's List—an elite political entity that began as a grassroots social movement organization—as a case, this article integrates scholarship from sociology and political science to examine how feminist activist organizing can impact women's interest in running for public office. I first review the research on women's candidate emergence and CTPs before discussing the electoral movement strategies and the mobilizing impact of the media and collective action frames. The article reviews recent scholarship on the Women's March and the Resistance, then synthesizes the literature to examine EMILY's List and their electoral movement strategies leading up to the 2018 midterm elections. I conclude by suggesting avenues for future research that

can bridge the relationship between movements and electoral politics and advance scholarly understanding of how, when, and why women run for office.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Women are underrepresented at every level of American politics. However, despite research demonstrating stark and persistent gender gaps in the electoral process, Americans witnessed an unprecedented mobilization of women seeking candidate training programs (CTPs) following the 2016 election. In particular, interest in the EMILY's List (EList, hereafter)[1] CTP, *Run to Win*, jumped from 920 during the 2016 election cycle to 42,000 by the November 2018 midterms (EMILY's List, 2018a). This shift in electoral interest is significant because CTPs help women overcome the barriers that negatively impact their interest in running for office (Hennings, 2011, p. 319; Scott, 2018). Furthermore, increased gender representation in political institutions empowers other women to run for office and yields policies that reflect a greater diversity of needs and perspectives (Carroll & Fox, 2018). Given that representation is a key indicator of whether a group's interests are advanced within formal institutions (Paxton et al., 2007), understanding the factors contributing to women seeking political office is critical to the health and stability of American democracy.

2 | WOMEN'S UNDERREPRESENTATION IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Women's underrepresentation in American politics stems from a persistent shortage of female candidates in the political pipeline (Darcy et al., 1994). Previous research has examined the psychological factors that depress women's electoral interest during the *candidate emergence process*, where one considers a run for office and decides to enter their first political race (Lawless & Fox, 2005, p. 13). For example, boys are more likely than girls to be socialized to think about politics as a career path as children, leading women to be less interested in running for office as adults (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Similarly, the idea that politics is a "man's game," whereby social, cultural, and institutional norms shape perceptions about a woman's place in the male-dominated arena of American politics, has been shown to depress women's political engagement (Dittmar, 2015b). Election aversion, where women are less likely than men to volunteer for leadership positions if a competitive electoral process is involved (Kanthak & Woon, 2015), also creates barriers to women's participation.[2] Women are also less interested in running for office because they do not see a career in politics as a way to produce positive change in their communities (Shames, 2017).

Other research examines the social forces impacting women's electoral interest, arguing that psychological factors are overemphasized in previous research. For instance, Carroll and Sanbonmatsu (2013) argue that pursuing a political candidacy is a relationally embedded decision for women. That is, the decision to run for office is impacted by the beliefs and reactions of others and involves "considerations of how candidacy and office holding would affect the lives of others with whom the potential candidate has close relationships" (p. 45). Additionally, women are more likely to seriously consider a run for office if someone else suggests it, demonstrating that women's electoral interest "often originates outside the individual" (Bledsoe & Herring, 1990; Sanbonmatsu & Carroll, 2017).[3] Similarly, Piscopo (2018) argues that the dramatic increase in women's political candidacies after

the 2016 election demonstrates that electoral interest is fluid and adaptable, rather than a fixed aspect of one's psychological nature.

Though much has been written about the increases in women's electoral participation since the 2016 election, innovative new research is advancing our knowledge about women at the early stages of candidate emergence: those who recently attended a CTP. Scholarship in this area demonstrates that CTPs facilitate women's electoral participation by providing them with the skills necessary to pursue a political candidacy. In the section that follows, I review the literature on CTPs more broadly and then provide a brief profile of EList and their CTP, *Run to Win.*

3 | CANDIDATE TRAINING PROGRAMS

CTPs are "the ultimate recruiting tool" and have been used in the past to target individuals from underrepresented groups to run for public office (Monk, 2019, p. 6). As such, training programs are typically embedded within informal organizations and function to advance group interests within the formal political system. Parent organizations recruit potential candidates who receive organizational support for their candidacies through training and skills-building (Cutler, 2015; Piscopo, 2018). For example, civil rights groups, religious institutions, conservative organizations, and labor unions have long used CTPs to address barriers that ordinary citizens face in their political candidacies (Rozell, 2000). However, the history, program format, and organizational features of CTPs vary greatly (Cutler, 2015).

A recent census of women's candidate groups in the U.S. provides a descriptive profile of organizations that support women's candidacies through training, recruiting, and funding (Kreitzer & Osborn, 2019). Such programs operate at the regional and national levels,[4] and of the nearly 400 active groups in the United States, 268 train women to run for office in some capacity. Some of the first groups supporting women's candidacies emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, though many were founded in the 1920 and 1970s (Kreitzer & Osborn, 2019).

Program format and content vary greatly, as well. Some focus on in-person events, while a few programs have developed online training platforms to increase the accessibility of their resources (Piscopo, 2018). A handful of programs only offer online instruction.[5] The time commitment associated with each training also varies by program. Some CTPs offer 1–2-day workshops, while others require that participants commit to a 6-month or year-long program (Bernhard et al., 2020). Generally speaking, CTPs develop skills around essential aspects of running a campaign, such as designing a campaign plan, fundraising, budgeting, public speaking, district researching, assessing opponents, working with the media, and establishing a digital presence (Cutler, 2015; Hennings, 2011, p. 319; Piscopo, 2018; Schneider & Sweet-Cushman, 2020). And perhaps because women are more likely to run when they have a "network of encouragers" (Deen & Shelton, 2020, p. 95; Sweet-Cushman, 2018), trainings also facilitate network building among participants (Och, 2020; Sanbonmatsu, 2015).

CTPs have historically utilized a variety of recruitment strategies to identify potential candidates. For instance, the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) recruits women who are already active community members, such as those serving on local school boards or who have started businesses (Rozell, 2000). In addition, some training organizations employ a litmus test to determine which women they recruit to their programs. Of the nearly 400 groups that Kreitzer and Osborn (2019) identified in their census of women's candidate groups, 300 use abortion rights as a litmus test for the women they recruit.[6] Some training programs use partisanship to identify their potential participants, though there are also many nonpartisan options available (Kreitzer & Osborn, 2019).

The institutional composition of CTP parent organizations varies as well, though most are embedded within nonprofit organizations (Piscopo, 2018). For example, Emerge America is a nonprofit that recruits and trains democratic women to run for office (Emerge America, 2018). The National Federation of Republican Women is a nonprofit that has been training Republican women to run for office since 1938 (NFRW, 2011). In comparison, *Run to Win* is embedded within EList, a "multipronged influence organization" that supports the candidacies of democratic prochoice women through recruitment, training, and funding.[7]

Since its inception in 1985, EList has helped elect 100 democratic prochoice women to the House, 26 to the Senate, 16 to governors' seats, and hundreds of women to state and local office (EMILY's List, 2021). And though today EList is an elite electoral entity, the organization began as an extra-institutional, feminist activist network, "borne out of frustration" with women's underrepresentation in American politics (Pimlott, 2010, p. 13). EList founder, Ellen Malcolm, whose roots are in the civil rights and women's movements of the 1970s, has described the story of her organization as "the saga of a great social movement...that saga is the story of the rise of women in American politics" (Malcolm & Unger, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, as an organization, EList operates in the electoral realm *from* a movement background, making it an interesting case to examine from both a sociological and political science perspective.

Previous research demonstrates that CTPs provide women with a set of skills they can deploy should they choose to run for political office. However, despite the wealth of knowledge supplied by CTPs, the simple fact that they exist as a political resource for women cannot account for recent attendance increases. Therefore, we need to look for other explanations to understand the shift in women's electoral interest after the 2016 election. As EList occupies space in both the formal and informal arena of American politics, it stands to argue that a theory of collective action may help illuminate the forces that mobilized women to seek their candidate training resources.

4 | SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE ELECTORAL OPTION

Sociologists offer varying definitions of social movements (Roggeband & Klandermans, 2017). However, they are nearly always conceptualized as a way to resolve grievances and affect social change from *outside* of the formal political process (Pettinicchio, 2012). As such, scholars have drawn conceptual distinctions between informal movement activities and formal political participation within the electoral environment. For example, movement, or "activist," activities comprise of participating in a demonstration, signing a petition, boycotting, and contacting a politician (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010). On the other hand, electoral, or "institutional," forms of participation include activities that contribute to the functioning of a democratic government, such as voting, working on a political campaign, and joining a party organization (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010) and running for public office (Gulzar, 2021).

These distinctions also cut across disciplinary lines, in that social movements are typically studied by sociologists (Vráblíková, 2017), while the preeminent studies of women's candidate emergence are from the field of political science.[8] However, there has been a rapid growth in social movement scholarship across social science disciplines since the 1990s (Roggeband & Klandermans, 2017), and—perhaps as a consequence—a call to reconsider the extra-institutional conceptualization of social movements (McAdam & Tarrow, 2013).

Building on the contentious politics model, McAdam and Tarrow (2010, 2013) recently introduced a framework for understanding the reciprocal relationship between social movements and electoral outcomes. Using *the electoral option* strategy, movement actors create opportunities to advance their organizational agenda within the formal political realm by running for public office (Binder, 2002). In this way, entering a political contest "is a potential [movement] strategy to advance issues neglected by mainstream parties" (Hutter et al., 2019, p. 330).

Previous scholarship has consistently found evidence of the electoral option when examining the relationship between activist organizing and political outcomes. For example, during the Civil Rights era in the 1960s, movement leaders utilized elections to gain access to political power. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was created during that time specifically to run candidates and "[gain] black control over political decisions affecting their own communities" (p. 263). The electoral option has also been pursued by groups with ties to the White supremacist movement. In their study of women in the White supremacist movement, Blee and Yates (2017) find that the Ku Klux Klan competed for electoral office in the 1920s to gain influence over national politics (p. 751).

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has also adopted the electoral option strategy in their "shift from direct action protest to other forms of activism and institution building" (Chatelain, 2019, p. 129). For instance, in 2020, BLM activist Cori Bush ran for a Congressional seat because "the country needs Black Lives Matter activists

in Congress" (Bush, 2021). Similarly, Lucy McBath, whose son was shot and killed at a gas station in Jacksonville, Florida, won her Congressional race in 2019 (McBath, 2018). Running on a platform of racial justice and gun control, McBath frequently noted that the murder of her son and her subsequent political activism was a mobilizing force in her pursuit of a career in politics (Herndon, 2018).

Women's movement organizations have also utilized the electoral option to increase women's representation in political office. For example, Orleck (1993) describes the surge of activist mobilizing among working-class American housewives during the Depression. Through the late 1920 and 1940s, women of the housewives movement ran for electoral office in Washington and Michigan as a "conscious attempt...to change the system that they blamed for the Depression" (p. 149). Similarly, Meltzer (2009) describes women's electoral pursuits in the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) in the years after World War II. In the early 1950s, GFWC leaders encouraged their activists to run for public office as an act of citizenship that could advance their cause of social and political equality of the sexes.

Last, Marshall (2002) chronicles the electoral activities of women involved in the NWPC in the mid-1990s, including voting, donating, volunteering, and running for office, while arguing that these women identify as *activists*, rather than political operatives. In doing so, Marshall highlights the intersection between movements and elections by describing how NWPC activists pursue electoral objectives to support their movement community goals of "[promoting] an increase in the number of feminist women in elective and appointed office" (p. 712).

The research in this section demonstrates that social movements have historically mobilized activist candidates to run for office as a strategy to achieve their organizational goals within the halls of political power. Despite the prevalence of this strategy in previous movements, candidacies were mobilized from *within* the movement's ranks. How did EList mobilize women's electoral interest beyond its activist base?

Early work on political participation argued that "mobilization, in all its forms, causes people to take part in electoral politics. Citizens who are contacted by political parties, exposed to intensely fought electoral campaigns, or inspired by the actions of social movements are more likely to vote, to persuade, to campaign, and to give" (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, pp. 209–210). It follows that movements may also mobilize individuals to run for office. In the next section, I review the sociological literature on collective action frames and how they can interact with the media to influence movement participation.

5 | HOW COLLECTIVE ACTION FRAMES AND THE MEDIA MOBILIZE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

This section of the review examines the sociological literature on the use of collective action frames by social movements to mobilize participation. I also discuss the media's importance in disseminating the messaging embedded within such frames to the broader public. The section concludes with a brief discussion on a handful of political science studies that have examined the impact of frames on women's electoral interest.

Social movement scholars use framing theory to analyze how individuals are mobilized to engage in collective action (Snow & Benford, 1988). At the individual level, frames function as a template to help people define, respond to, and interpret their social reality (Goffman, 1974; Kinder & Sanders, 1990). At the institutional level, political actors, movement entities, and the media use frames to provide "a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events [suggesting] what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143).

As a strategy to drive public engagement and achieve organizational goals, social movements utilize *collective action frames*, which are "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (SMO)" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). The collective action framing process must perform three core framing tasks to galvanize movement support: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing (Snow & Benford, 1988). The diagnostic framing process identifies the problem and attributes

blame, while the prognostic framing process proposes a solution and presents the strategy for carrying out the plan. Last, the motivational framing process is a call to arms, urging others to respond to the controversy. By attending these three core framing tasks, SMOs drive public support around a problematic situation or issue they seek to remedy. Once constructed, the collective action frame is disseminated to the public through *frame diffusion* (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). This process often occurs through the media.

Social movements rely heavily on the media to mobilize the public on their behalf through frame diffusion (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). For example, Karpf (2018) asserts that "the power of any social movement's tactics is partially based on how they are designed to align with the contemporary media system" (p. 148). In addition, Ketelaars (2017) shows that activist motives are shaped by the way the protest issues are framed by the media. In short, the media functions as a critical intermediary between movement entities and their potential supporters. Without media support, "a press release is just a piece of paper [and] a march or a rally...is largely indistinguishable from a long, crowded walk or a noisy day in the park with friends" (Karpf, 2018, p. 148).

Though distinct from research examining movement frames, a handful of political science studies have investigated the impact of framing processes on women's electoral interest. For instance, Schneider et al. (2016) find that women express higher electoral interest rates when researchers frame the life of a political representative as fulfilling communal goals, rather than independent objectives. In addition, Schneider and Sweet-Cushman (2020) find that CTPs help women reframe their notions about politics, leading participants to feel more positive about a career in the field. Last, Holman and Schneider (2018) find that when women's underrepresentation in American politics was framed as stemming from discrimination, rather than from their own failing to participate, women's interest in running for office increased. These studies lend credibility to the argument being made in this review: that frames do have the ability to stimulate women's interest in running for and holding political office.

This review of framing effects—whether generated from within the individual or deployed by a social movement— suggests that such tools may have the ability to impact electoral interest among women. In the next section, I synthesize the research outlined thus far to examine women's interest in *Run to Win* following the 2016 election.

6 | A SOCIAL MOVEMENT PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S POST-2016 ELECTORAL ENGAGEMENT: THE CASE OF EMILY'S LIST

This section integrates research on social movements and electoral politics to examine how EList operated as an SMO to mobilize women's interest in *Run to Win* following the 2016 election. To begin, I discuss the January 2017 Women's March and the anti-Trump Resistance movement. I then discuss the role of EList in the Resistance and their use of a collective action frame to channel women's resistance energy into political candidacies. The section closes with an overview of the media coverage of the surge of interest in *Run to Win* and women's political gains during the 2018 midterm election.

6.1 | The Women's March and the Anti-Trump Resistance movement

The Women's March was held on 21 January 2017, to protest Donald Trump's election to the highest office in U.S. politics (Hartocollis & Alcindor, 2017). A coordinated effort mobilized over 4 million people nationwide (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017), though one of the largest demonstrations took place in Washington, D.C., with an estimated 500,000 people in attendance (Fisher et al., 2017; Rafferty, 2021).

The 2017 Women's March is heralded as the beginning of *the Resistance,* which consists of individuals and organizations working to challenge the Trump administration and its policies (Fisher, 2019, p. 216). And while the Resistance movement reflects previous movements in that it consists of individuals and groups seeking to resolve

grievances and affect social change, the Resistance is also different from other social movements throughout history. First, many movements focus on one social or political issue. However, the Resistance comprises several other movements, including, but not limited to, the women's movement, BLM, the Immigrant Rights Movement, Occupy Wall Street, and anti-gun violence and climate movements. The Resistance includes many movements because multiple issues are threatened under the Trump administration (Fisher, 2019, p. 216). Therefore, rather than focusing on a single grievance, the Resistance mobilizes around many social issues. The Resistance is also unique because of the types of people that are getting involved. For instance, the Resistance includes individuals with a wealth of activist and electoral experience, including movement veterans and former political operatives. However, it has also mobilized a massive amount of brand new activists (Maresca & Meyer, 2020). Last, the Resistance is unique in the way that it has worked to achieve its goals. Resisters have deployed a combination of informal activities such as demonstrating, signing petitions, and contacting politicians, but they have also engaged in formal political activities such as voting, working on a political campaign, and running for office (Fisher, 2019, p. 216).

The Resistance's unique characteristics have significant consequences vis-à-vis the types of outcomes it has produced. For example, in the year following Trump's inauguration, the U.S. saw "the most remarkable 365 days of protest in U.S. history" (Andrews et al., 2018, p. 393). Between January 2017 and 2018, more than two million people attended over 6500 protest events across the nation. In addition, the electoral gains achieved in the 2018 midterm elections can be linked, in part, to the work of Resistance groups seeking to "institutionalize their concerns and provide [a] meaningful check on the Trump administrative initiatives" (Maresca & Meyer, 2020, p. 7). Finally, there is reason to believe that the number of women that EList has been able to recruit to their CTP has helped build a pipeline of women ready to run for office in the years to come (EMILY's List, 2018a). In short, the overlap in issues, involvement in types of participants, and various tactics of the Resistance has "promoted a mixing of activists and campaigns that is likely to have long term effects" (Maresca & Meyer, 2020, p. 7).

6.2 | The role of EMILY's list in the Resistance

The role of EList in the Resistance centers on their strategic use of collective action frames to mobilize women's electoral interest and the diffusion of that frame to the public via the media. The 2017 Women's March was the site where EList established itself as a critical player in the effort to mobilize women's candidacies after the 2016 election. In the preceding weeks, EList recognized the opportunity to recruit female activists to run for office during the Women's March and decided to offer a candidate training the next day.

Successfully resisting the Trump administration has required that organizations engage in tactical and strategic innovations in the media realm (Karpf, 2018). As such, EList issued a press release announcing their candidate training that appealed to participants, *"Don't Just March, Run!"* (EMILY's List, 2017a). The announcement asserts, "There's a reason why women are taking to the streets to protest the new president. His dangerous agenda is set to hurt women the most, and we know it's up to us to fight back against the xenophobia and misogyny that fuels his administration...Our ability to own our futures, plan our families, and support our children and ourselves is at stake." (EMILY's List, 2017a). This section of the press release exemplifies the collective action frame's first core task, diagnostic framing, where the problem is identified, and blame is attributed. Here, both the problem and the blame are attributed to Donald Trump, though the diagnosis also reflects larger, systemic issues that he represents, such as racism and sexism.

Next, the press release moves to the second task of the collective action frame, prognostic framing. Here, a solution and the strategy for carrying out the plan are proposed: "We need women running for every office at every level...If you're marching in D.C., you know the power of activism. Put that power to work taking over the ballot. We can show you how: SIGN UP." (EMILY's List, 2017a). The final component of the collective action frame is motivational framing or a call to arms. Here, EList urged Women's March participants to respond to the crisis presented

by the Trump administration: "Strong, progressive women must fight back...it's time for us to step up and lead the way...The world of political campaigning can seem a little unruly for someone who hasn't done it before. But like anything, the more you know, the better the decisions you can make. We run trainings for women ready to wage and win campaigns that put them in office and empower them to drive change. Attend the 'Getting Ready to Run' Training on January 22nd."

Shortly after the press release was issued, the media covered the upcoming Women's March training (Bellstrom, 2017; Mack, 2017). In these instances, the media provided information about how to access the training, but they also diffused the collective action frame linking protest participation with running for office. For example, an article titled "The Women's March on Washington Will Also Teach Women How to Run for Office" reported that "women planning on traveling to Washington, D.C. to attend a mass protest against the new president will now also have the opportunity to learn how to run for office themselves" (Mack, 2017). A few days later, Fortune magazine reported on the training, noting that "EMILY's List...is seizing on the upcoming Women's March on Washington to do more than just protest" (Bellstrom, 2017). Here, EList President Stephanie Schriock asserted that "it made sense to try to use the protest as a way to recruit future female leaders" (Mack, 2017).

Every seat was filled at the Women's March candidate training. Five hundred women learned "the basics of how to run for office for the first time, from how to pick the right race to the necessity of cleaning up social media profiles...[and] how to overcome that insidious feeling of being intimidated—by the commitment, the complexity, the vulnerability—of running for office." (Nelson, 2017). Some participants had considered running for office in the past, while for others, it had never crossed their minds. For both types of women, the urgency of the political moment had driven them to attend the training (Nelson, 2017).

Given the mobilizing power of the media and collective action framing, it stands to reason that the activists attending the Women's March were driven to the EList training as a result of their use of the electoral option movement strategy.

6.3 | From the Women's March to the midterms

This section reviews the collective action framing activities from the Women's March to the November 2018 midterm elections. I examine EList's use of press releases about their recruitment gains and the subsequent media coverage of those milestones to demonstrate how American women may have been mobilized to seek the *Run to Win* candidate training resources. To my knowledge, EList is the only organization that issued press releases highlighting the relationship between activism and electoral politics while mobilizing women to seek training resources through *Run to Win*. This characteristic distinguishes the tactics used by EList from other CTPs that were operating during the same period. While many of these groups saw similar surges of interest in their trainings, they did not experience the gains at the magnitude that EList saw.

Following the Women's March, EList began its "most aggressive" candidate recruitment effort in the organization's history (Przybyla, 2017). *USA Today* reported that EList was "doubling its resources to connect women with the tools they need to run for office" to "harness the energy of a grassroots movement... into a progressive resistance to Trump's agenda" (Przybyla, 2017). As part of this recruitment effort, EList launched *Run to Win*, a new training program intended to channel women's resistance energy into political candidacies (EMILY's List, 2017b). In their February 2017 press release announcing the new program, EList reported that over 4000 women had contacted them since the 2016 election. In 3 months, EList had far surpassed their previous recruitment record from the entire 2016 election cycle, when 920 women reached out to them for training resources (Przybyla, 2017).

The electoral option collective action frame is also evident in media coverage EList and women's political engagement following the Women's March. For example, in a feature of the 2017 Women's March, *TIME* magazine published an article titled, "Perhaps the Largest Protest in History was Brought to you by Trump" (Vick, 2017). The author draws connections between the "collective outrage [of the] resistance movement" and

women's electoral interest. Vick (2017) also discusses how EList hosted a training on how to run for office following the Woman's March. The *New York Times* ran a similar story later that year, titled, "Women Line Up to Run for Office, Harnessing Their Outrage at Trump" (Tackett, 2017). Here, women discussed how Donald Trump's election and the Women's March drove their activism and their decision to run for office. The article also highlights the number of women that had contacted EList about *Run to Win*, which had "exploded to more than 22,000" (Tackett, 2017).

As the election cycle marched on, EList continued to disperse their collective action frame through their press releases and report on the number of women that had contacted them about *Run to Win*. Each press release executed the three core framing tasks of the collective action frame, urging women to run for office as an act of political resistance to the Trump administration while promoting *Run to Win* as a way to access the formal political realm. By strategically releasing these numbers throughout the election cycle, EList ensured that their collective action frame would appear in the news at every organizational milestone.

By the November 2018 midterms, EList had heard from over 42,000 women interested in running for office (EMILY's List, 2018b). During the 2018 "Year of the Woman," voters ushered in a record-breaking number of women to congressional seats, statewide executive offices, and gubernatorial positions (Dittmar, 2019). Reflecting on the 2018 Year of the Woman, EList president Stephanie Schriock claimed that "[come] January, there will be an historic number of women in elected office because of the work EList has done" (EMILY's List, 2018a). While it remains unclear whether the electoral gains seen by women in the United States can be attributed solely to EList, this review suggests that their use of collective action frames and the widespread visibility of their training resources may have helped increase the number of women in the political pipeline. Should these women choose to run for office in the future, this wealth of potential candidacies has the chance to make significant movement toward representational parity in American politics.

7 | CONCLUSION

Despite the wealth of research demonstrating stark and persistent gender gaps in political participation, women have shown dramatic increases in electoral interest since the 2016 election. At the same time, we have not witnessed a concurrent shift in the factors that deter women's interest in running for office. In this review, I have argued that collective action and social movement mobilization theories may help illuminate the sudden and dramatic increases of electoral interest among women in the United States. In the next section, I outline opportunities for future scholars to bridge disciplinary divides and explore the intersection between social movements and electoral politics.

The scholarship on CTPs has produced promising results on how CTPs can propel women's candidacies by increasing their access to the skills necessary to succeed. However, the forces driving recent interest in CTPs are poorly understood. Future research could theoretically ground itself in the social movements and political science literature to examine the rise of potential candidacies as a function of collective mobilization. Additionally, scholars should explore whether other organizations have adopted the mobilization efforts of EList and, if so, how successful have those efforts been?

In a similar vein, future research could explore how CTPs stimulate political engagement among women from other groups that have been historically marginalized and excluded from political power. For example, Victory Institute trains the LGBTQ population, and Higher Heights supports the political candidacies of Black women in America. Examining these organizations' efforts to amplify voices from marginalized groups would greatly enrich the literature on representational disparities in American politics.

The recent increases in women's electoral interest may signal a shift in what we know about how women gain access to the formal political system. Future research in this area could offer novel contributions to the gender and politics literature and advance our understanding of how, when, and why women decide to run for office.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This naming convention is adopted from Pimlott's (2010) book on EMILY's List.

[2] Though see Wolak (2020) who argues that gender gaps in political engagement are better understood as a product of men's comparatively higher levels of enjoyment of arguments and disagreements, as opposed to being driven by a greater aversion to conflict among women.

[3] Although Dittmar (2015a) finds that the most influential types of encouragement on women's likelihood of running for office comes from a party leader or an elected official.

[4] Similar efforts exist throughout the world. See Piscopo (2020) for a comparative perspective on CTPs around the world and Johnson (2020) for a description of training programs in Benin, a small African democracy located to the west of Nigeria.

[5] For example, *Run for Something* and *She Should Run*.

[6] 226 are pro-abortion and 74 are anti-abortion.

[7] Pimlott (2010) argues that EList is a political action committee (PAC), an interest group, a campaign organization, and Democratic party adjuct.

[8] For example, see Bernhard, et al., 2020; Crowder-Meyer, 2018; Dittmar, 2015; Holman & Schneider, 2018; Och, 2020; Sanbonmatsu & Dittmar, 2020; Schneider & Sweet-Cushman, 2020; Shames, 2017.

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