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Father Founders: Did Child Gender Affect Voting at the Constitutional Convention?

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Abstract: *How did child gender affect deliberations and voting at the 1787 U.S. Constitutional Convention? Though recent scholarship has found profound and far-reaching influence of child gender upon the beliefs and behavior of modern parents, there is no reason to believe that this is only an important consideration in the present. Leveraging the natural experiment of child gender, we test whether the gender of a delegate's children influenced his voting. We hypothesize that fathers of sons would favor creating a strong national government because they could more easily envision their sons holding places in the emergent empire (especially younger sons). Using new data on delegates' children, we find statistically and substantively significant results: having sons indeed predicts delegates' favoring a stronger, centralized national government (with daughters showing an opposite effect). These differences are sufficiently large to have likely affected the Convention's proceedings and therefore the U.S. Constitution.*

Replication Materials: The data, code, and any additional materials required to replicate all analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science Dataverse* within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ENVKCB.

I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.

—John Adams in a letter to Abigail Adams, May 12, 1780

How did gender[1] affect deliberations and voting at the Federal Convention of 1787, more popularly known as the Constitutional Convention? At first blush, it may seem impossible to answer this question through any form of quantitative analysis. After all, the delegates were uniformly male and a constant (maleness) cannot be used to explain variations in individual preferences and behavior. That is true so long as the subject of analysis is the gender of the delegates. But all human beings are bound up in networks of personal relationships where gender does vary. The most important of these networks is, often, a person's family—like the relationship between John Adams and his wife Abigail, who counseled him to not only "remember the ladies," but also to remember the future they envisioned for their children. Insofar as expectations about children's future were constrained by norms of gender roles, even the universally male founders may, as fathers, have had perspectives and preferences shaped by the varied gender of their children.

While the Revolution was still in doubt, Adams expressed (in the quotation above) the view that he was working for his posterity. His duty to study "politics and war" was imposed by the necessity of the moment, but he hoped that his posterity would be free to study other, more worthy subjects in the future. There is a

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[1]The decision of which term to use in this paper—"gender" or "sex"— was one we considered carefully given the time period, context and subject matter. In the climate of the eighteenth century, differences between the two concepts are less distinct because of the stricter gender expectations, which are a central feature of our argument. However, our independent variable in the model is really the sex of delegate's children. We have mostly used the term "gender" because of the nature of our theoretical argument, but occasionally use "sex" when speaking directly about the empirical model.

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distinctly gendered note to Adams's desire. He hopes that his "sons" will be able to study other subjects (and then in the final clause discusses their "children," a vague, but perhaps more inclusive description). His daughters go unmentioned. It is only when Adams turns to relatively more artistic pursuits that he includes a potentially wider swath of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The more conventional careers of surveying, science, military and commercial activity seem to be implicitly for sons.

The quotation makes it obvious that Adams did think about the careers of his sons and how they would interact with the growing republic. *Sons* would be given those opportunities if Adams and his generation were successful in their efforts. It is in this sense that we aim to study the effect of gender on the Constitution—not the gender of those who voted, but *the gender of their children*. If Adams's quotation is representative of how men thought in this period (though he was ambassador to the Court of St. James at the time of the Convention), it suggests a difference in thinking about one's posterity and the family's opportunities.

Given the gender roles of the age, if the republic grew and prospered, its offices and the related commercial and social occupations would be inhabited by sons (though not daughters), especially the sons of the era's political leaders and "power elite" (Domhoff 1990) such as Adams and his contemporaries at the Convention. This was a period where gender roles were well-defined. The sharp distinction in expectations for sons versus daughters creates at least two important incentives that we test in this article.

First, fathers of sons could see additional opportunities for their sons in a newly expanded government. Though family advancement might not have been paramount in their minds, for purposes of advancing the careers of sons—especially second and third sons who needed a place beyond family estates—the creation of *more* and, in some cases, *more influential* governmental offices would be more likely to benefit the families with sons than those with daughters. This disparate impact would be particularly sharp in the families of the political elite, our subjects of focus. The dynastic tendencies of American politics at the founding granted substantial social standing and opportunity for elected office to heirs—virtually always sons—of political power in elites' families.

Second, because fathers of sons—especially the political fathers of sons—could anticipate that the reins of government power would be handled by their posterity, they had far less to fear from a more powerful government. The political elites of the era were all too aware of the danger that a government with a broad scope of authority—like the one they fought against in the Revolution—would be abused. But the danger of that abuse was greatly diminished, at least in subjective terms, if the drafters personally knew and trusted at least some of the future leaders of the incipient American republic: their own posterity. Fathers of daughters had no such reassurance.[2] All else equal, then, a father of sons tasked with designing a new national government would as a result likely be more comfortable with expanding national government authority than his counterparts with daughters.

Would these incentives lead a Constitutional Convention delegate with sons to be more interested in creating a stronger national government with attendant opportunities, offices, and privileges? Below we present the evidence from a newly compiled dataset on delegate children at the moment of the Convention suggesting that delegates with more sons were significantly more likely to favor the reforms necessary to build a strong central government (fathers of daughters, if anything, felt the opposite). In doing so we follow in the footsteps of studies that have demonstrated the importance of the gender of children to the attitudes and actions of parents in a modern political context, but in the setting of the eighteenth century. Similarly, we add an entirely novel dimension to the literature on how characteristics of the convention delegates such as wealth (McGuire and Ohsfeldt 1984 and 1986), slave-holding (Heckelman and Dougherty 2013 and Pope and Treier 2015), and cosmopolitanism (McGuire 2003), among other things, are clear predictors of delegate voting behavior. Our research confirms that family relationships—specifically the gender of a delegate's children—clearly belong on the list of relevant predictors. This conclusion has profound implications: the fact that many of the American Founding (big *F*) Fathers were also (little *f*) fathers shaped the ultimate form of the U.S. Constitution in significant and measurable ways.

Child Gender and Political Preferences

When parents decide to have a child they are—in most circumstances—not able to control the sex of that child. This makes the child's sex a type of natural experiment.

[2]It is true that even fathers of daughters might someday have *sons-in-law* who could rise to political prominence. But as any father of daughters will attest (and one of the authors has three), daughters' suitors are (at least initially) trusted no more than total strangers, and often significantly less.

The experience of being a parent to a son or a daughter is exogenous and not related to other key characteristics about one's political views like partisanship or ideology. Though some arguments can be leveled against this claim of independence (sex selection through abortion, adoption, etc.), these are special cases and require a very specific set of circumstances to matter.[3] For virtually all cases, the experience of being a parent to a son or a parent to a daughter is exogenous and therefore causally identifies the effects of that experience.

Several studies suggest that child gender affects parental behavior in the realm of law and policy. Washington (2008) finds that members of the U.S. Congress who have daughters are more likely to vote more liberally on abortion issues than are those who have sons.[4] Glynn and Sen (2015) find that "conditional on the number of children a judge has," judges who parent daughters vote "in a more feminist fashion on gender issues than judges who have only sons." Their methodology (very similar to our own) tests a causal explanation of child gender on both legislators and judges. There is evidence for the effect among the mass public as well, though it is more contested. Fathers of daughters are more likely to hold feminist positions (Warner 1991 and Warner and Steel 1999) and hire female partners (Gompers and Wang 2017). The effects are not limited to daughters.

As to the influence of child gender on attitudes towards government power generally, effect estimates vary widely across contexts. Oswald and Powdthavee (2010) find that, in Britain, daughters seem to make fathers more "left-wing" and sons make them more "right-wing." They posit that this effect may be driven by higher levels of risk aversion in parents of daughters, which is the effect found in a recent study elsewhere in Europe by Pogrebna et al. (2018). There is also some evidence from China that having sons decreases risk aversion (Chew et al. 2017). But in other contexts, the effect is reversed or not present at all. Conley and Rauscher (2013) find that fathers with a higher proportion of female children tend to be more Republican in the United States. And in Australia, Jarallah, Perales, and Baxter (2016) found no impact on fathers' gender-role attitudes at all.[5] The disparity in effects we observe in the literature is suggestive that child gender's influence is highly-context dependent. Consequently, in the following section we consider how the unique circumstances of colonial and Revolutionary America might have shaped the effect of child gender on parent preferences vis-à-vis government power.

The Founding-Era America Context

In some ways, the parenting experience is irrelevant to gender as most parents simply care about their child's well-being. However, the societal context makes a great difference for what each child's future can be. In the eighteenth century, sons had relatively far more diverse career prospects. Daughters were no doubt important and loved, but would, eventually, be married off into another family. How might this affect a father's political attitudes? All of the theory and empirics cited above test this parental relationship in the present day or the very recent past. But does a gender effect hold for the past?

We now turn our attention to those dynamics the historical context surrounding the Constitutional Convention. In the eighteenth century, women's status was based on the home, hearth, and family, while men had greater opportunity to leave that setting for a public career in the community.[6] Women in the colonies, and later in the new states, may have participated in economic and political activity, but almost always through their status within the family. Women did not have independent careers in government or politics in the same way that men did. In fact, their role was in many ways defined by their relationship to men. As Norton puts it "the ideal American woman was to be the nurturant, patriotic mother who raised her children, *and especially her sons*, to be good Christians, active citizens, and successful competitors in the *wider arena of life*" (p. 617, emphasis added). Men could have careers in that "wider arena," but women remained at home. Whatever the source of this role definition,[7] sons had wider prospects than did daughters.[8] This is especially true of non-eldest sons who would not inherit the main estate but would typically require a career somewhere else in the world such as the law, the priesthood, the military or the government. How did this matter?

[3]Though modern technology yields some slight level of control, in our setting of concern—the eighteenth century—this is a far less significant consideration.

[4]See also Iacus, King and Porro (2012) for a similar research design using matching.

[5]See also Shafer and Malhotra (2011) for a finding on gender roles.

[6]See the appendix for slightly more discussion of this literature (p. 3) .

[7]Wells (1982) argues it was a mechanism to cope with instability.

[8]One misconception people often have is that women could not hold any property in the eighteenth century. The true state of things is not so simple. As Salmon (1986) points out, women sometimes held property under certain circumstances, that evolved over the course of the American Revolution.

The most obvious way relates to the career prospects for sons. Fathers of daughters planned for a future that they hoped would involve marriage and personal connections within family and social life. The father of a son, in contrast, needed to worry about his boy's future career—especially if he was the father of a larger number of boys. While first sons could expect to inherit the family estate, additional sons required prospects in some other field. And the emerging forms of democratic politics opened that as an arena as well—to *sons*. Delegates to the Convention could contemplate their sons not only becoming a lawyer, a merchant or a plantation owner, but also realizing future *political* prospects as well.

This is important because, though it may have seemed parochial to the much larger kingdoms of Europe, the budding American republic was building an empire of its own. Who would fill out the offices of that new national government? Though it is not always talked about in these terms, the Constitutional Convention was the single largest and most important expansion of government in American history, creating two entirely new branches: the executive and the judiciary. These new branches and their corresponding powers would require a significant array of new officeholders and national leaders that went far beyond the state politics of the day. And all branches of the new government would vest extraordinary new authority (and potential for abuse) in the hands of their officeholders.

How would this influence a delegate father at the Convention? If the experience of being a father of sons differed from being a father of daughters, etc., and if those differences in experience led to a disparity in preferences about the new government, it should be the case that fathers of sons were more likely to favor the creation of that new stronger central government. Delegates could expect that such a government would both 1) produce more offices for their sons, and 2) place control of the republic in the hands of people they trusted—their own posterity. Such expectations, whether conscious or unconscious, were reasonable. Political inheritances were the empirical reality of the time. In pre-revolutionary New Jersey and Georgia, for example, more than 70 percent of elected representatives were relatives of previous representatives (Wood 1991).

Child Gender at the Convention

Were the prospects for delegates' children in the new government openly discussed at the Convention? References to daughters are easily dispensed with. To our knowledge, there is only one (unhelpful) reference specifically to daughters at the Convention. On August 9, the delegates debated how long citizens should have to reside in the United States before holding such the office of senator. Gouverneur Morris offered a dubious witticism arguing that Americans should be polite to foreigners, but not immediately grant them too much power. "It is said that some tribes of Indians, carried their hospitality so far as to offer to strangers their wives and daughters. Was this a proper model for us? [Morris] would admit them to his house, he would invite them to his table, would provide for them comfortable lodgings; but would not carry the complaisance" any further (Farrand Vol II, p. 237). The passage is of little help to our inquiry.

There are a number of references in the Convention to delegates' children or posterity generally. For instance, Madison's notes for July 14 record Sherman observing—in a debate over whether or not future western states should be the equal of the original thirteen states—that "[w]e are providing for our posterity, for our children & our grand Children, who would be as likely to be citizens of new Western States, as of the old States." Unfortunately, none of these references shed light on any distinction between daughters and sons in the minds of the delegates, though they do suggest a powerful interest in protecting future posterity and serious thoughtfulness about how best to accomplish that.

Though few in number, references to sons do indicate their potential place in the future government and suggest delegates aware of this issue. In Yates's notes for July 2, for example, he quotes Gouverneur Morris as arguing that members of the second branch of the legislature should not be

> incapable of holding any office in the general government.—It is a dangerous expedient … The wealthy will ever exist; and you never can be safe unless you gratify them as a body, in the pursuit of honor and profit. Prevent them by positive institutions, and they will proceed in some left-handed way. A son may want a place—you mean to prevent him from promotion—They are not to be paid for their services—they will in some way pay themselves; nor is it in your power to prevent it.

Morris's reference to how sons will want a place—and how men of means will seek influence both for themselves and their family—is utterly consistent with the idea that the future national government was a place for their sons to exercise their talents. The idea had been raised before. On June 23, Madison quotes King as saying that the "idea of preventing intrigue and solicitation of offices

was chimerical" and that even if people are restrained from office this would not "restrain him from availing himself of the same means which would gain appointments for himself, to gain them for his son, his brother, or any other object of his partiality." Gerry responded in the debate that it was probably true that men might "still intrigue & cabal for their sons, brothers &c." Both King's and Gerry's comments assume the idea of men in general, and sons in particular, holding the office or trust. Daughters go unmentioned throughout this debate.

We note that there are good reasons why at least some beliefs would not necessarily be the subject of discussion. For instance, despite the ways in which John Locke's ideas were pivotal for many founders, he is mentioned only once on June 27 in a Luther Martin speech. The proper inference is not that John Locke was irrelevant but that his ideas were so widely influential that there was little need to debate them. Attitudes about gender were probably similar in at least this sense: delegates to the Convention held the commonplace views of the time period. They may have respected women in their prescribed roles, their production in the home, and their status within the society's limitations, but they assumed that women would not have political careers.[9] Thus, we should not expect that the textual records alone would reveal that sons were being groomed for the national government. The best that we can hope for is what we have found: evidence that the subject was plausible and in the minds of at least some delegates. While there is no single smoking gun in the record in which delegates unequivocally declare that they were regularly thinking about the place of their sons in the new government, there are a number of passages where the idea is consistently referenced in ways that indicate at least some rational consideration.

We stress that we do not necessarily believe that this motivation was a deliberate and conscious processing of familial costs and benefits for every single vote at the convention. It is quite possible (perhaps even likely) that some delegates may have had more of an intuitive or subconscious sense that a stronger, more centralized government would advantage or disadvantage them and their children. Indeed, given the mores of the period, we seriously doubt that any delegate ever critically considered the gendered nature of their motivations and suppositions. Consistent with past scholarship, (Washington 2008; Glynn and Sen 2012) we believe that many different motivations (such as explicit ambition, internal psychological forces, evolutionary instincts, or socialization) could have real effects on behavior. The point is that whatever the internal thought process, it seems possible that delegates systematically voted to advantage their sons for the benefit of the family.

Before turning to the key empirical evidence, we also wish to be clear about some additional limitations and caveats to our theory. We are *not* claiming that only sons were important to the delegates or that their daughter's prospects and happiness was irrelevant to delegates. We are merely saying that for purposes of creating a new government which would feature not only expansive powers (that were potentially vulnerable to abuse) but also opportunities for career advancement in the family, sons were a much more proximate consideration than were daughters because sons had the potential to inhabit the offices created by that government. We are also *not* saying that delegates were solely, or even mostly, concerned about the familial benefits of the new government.[10] Though many (Beard 1913, McGuire 2003) have argued that the government was created to protect their personal wealth or their slaves, our claim does not go so far. Rather, we are saying that given the choice in front of the delegates—reform the national system by creating a stronger national government or not—it was logical for fathers to have an extra incentive to favor the creation of that government, not necessarily as their best means to protect family wealth, but simply because, given the choice, family considerations could matter and even have downstream effects on their trust in government generally.

Finally, what about daughters? Daughters, lacking the opportunities available to sons, have a much weaker case for influence. They would not inhabit the government. However, it seems possible that daughters might have had affected fathers in another way. A daughter, as all children do, might have made an eighteenth-century founder more invested in the future, but because of her limited prospects, might simultaneously have made the father more uncertain of his family's place in that future. Daughters therefore might make one prefer the status quo to radical changes that generate additional uncertainties, possibly setting fathers of daughters and fathers of sons against one another.

[9]Though it is not directly associated with the Convention, see the letter from John Adams to Abigail in our Discussion section for an explicit instantiation of this assumption.

[10]Indeed, there are some notable outliers in the general pattern we outline in this paper. James Madison, for instance, had no sons, and he was famously one of the most pro-national government delegates at the Convention. Conversely, George Mason was one of the most prominent opponents of centralizing government power and had five sons. However, as we will show, these men are exceptions to the statistical rules we observe.

So, the empirical question is: what evidence can we find that having fathered sons—and perhaps having fathered daughters—led to different preferences, and therefore voting, at the Convention? If our theory is correct, delegates with more sons should be more interested in voting for a larger national government on the grounds that their sons would have the chance to fill out the growing empire. And history should show them to be correct in the judgment. It is conceivable that fathers of daughters, who may prefer the status quo, will tend to oppose the fathers of sons in their preferences for an expansive government plan. The next section produces the data available to test these claims.

Data and Measurements

Dependent Variable

Following McGuire and Ohsfeldt (1986) and McGuire (2003), our dependent variable is whether each delegate to the Constitutional Convention voted yes or no on a series of key votes first identified by Forrest McDonald (1958) and since employed by many scholars. McDonald originally selected sixteen key votes as especially informative for two reasons. First, he asserted that they all deal with the essential and overarching decision of the Convention: whether to strengthen the national government or to leave power with the states. This claim, as we discuss below, is debatable. However, the votes nonetheless provide a reasonably diverse set of issues with varying degrees of attenuation in their link to national power. The second reason for McDonald's selection of the sixteen key votes is that he claimed there is enough information—from Farrand's *Records*, delegate diaries, and other sources—to estimate how each *individual* delegate would have voted on this issue (though see below for some of the debate about this). Combined, these two unique features of McDonald's votes allow us to analyze the individual-level factors that might have played a role in the framers' choices about how much power to grant the new federal government. For this paper's purposes, we base our empirical inquiry on McDonald's framework (supplementing from other perspectives, see below).

Both McDonald (1958) and McGuire and Ohsfeldt (1986) attempt to make the case that all sixteen of the key votes can be construed as an expression of delegate desires to strengthen or weaken the national government. We are somewhat skeptical that this is true of all of them and have decided to exclude several votes on the basis of their being too tenuously linked to national power.[11] Following previous scholarship, we also exclude two votes where there are irreconcilable inconsistencies in the record. Table 1 describes all of the votes in their dataset.

Though all of these votes are connected in some ways to the new national government, our focus is on the creation of powers and offices in that new national government—and not directly on limitations on the states. We therefore select the eight votes (Votes 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14, and 15) that we believe to best represent the question of nationalizing and centralizing power in a new government. Votes 1 and 3, though substantially related to national power, must be excluded because of inconsistencies in the record identified by McGuire and Ohsfeldt (1986, pg. 95) and McDonald (see footnote 49 of McGuire and Ohsfeldt 1986). A more detailed justification for our choices is available in the appendix (see p. 4). However, we stress, and show in the Appendix's Table A5 (p. 11), that the effects of child gender on delegate preferences are robust to alternative (both stricter and looser) selections of which votes to include as dependent variables. Thus, while the eight votes we select reflect our best judgment, others may reasonably disagree with our decision of which votes to include in the best model, but will still observe the effects of child gender.

In addition to probit models of individual votes, we use indices that are the sum of yes votes for pro-national votes and no votes for anti-national votes. For example, our preferred index sums each delegate's yes votes on Votes 2, 8, 9, and 15 and their no votes on Votes 5, 6, 7, and 14 (The appendix shows that our vote choices are not crucial, as results remain consistent across various alternative indices; see Table A5, p. 12). When analyzing the index measures, we employ a poisson regression to better fit their nature as a form of count data. We note that our findings are robust to other modeling choices, such as the use of OLS regressions (see Appendix Table A6, p. 14) in place of our probit and poisson models.

Independent Variable

Our independent variable, and the novel measure of this paper, is the gender of each delegate's children, or specifically the number of sons and number of daughters. Given the founding period's distinct gender roles, this measure is meant to capture the degree to which each delegate

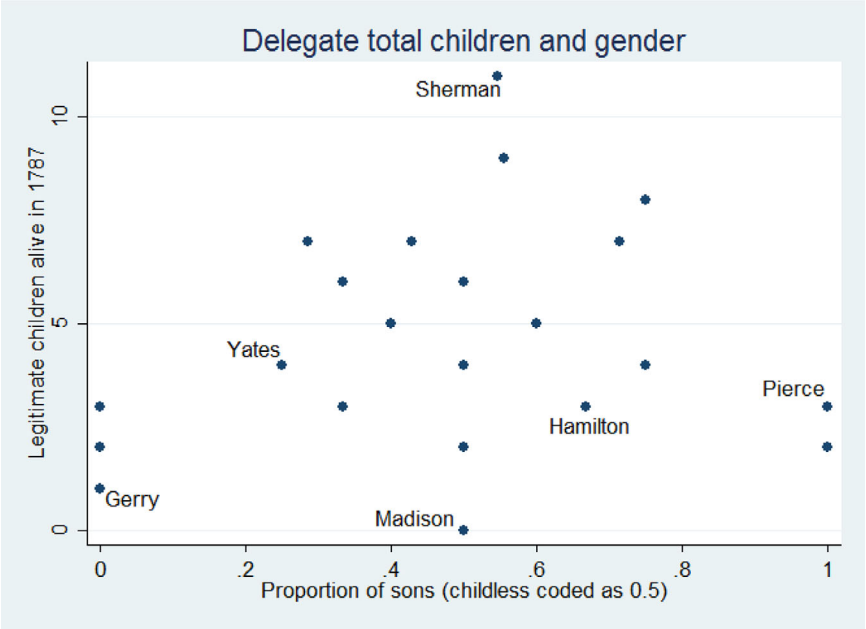
[11] As shown below (see Table A5 in the Appendix), the results remain qualitatively similar whether we use a very loose or very strict standard in deciding which votes to include.

TABLE 1 Vote Information

Number	Shorthand title	Pro- or anti-national?	Vote description
Vote 1	*Judicial Consent*	*Pro*	*To add a clause requiring a degree of national judicial consent for the use of the executive veto.*
Vote 2	**National Veto**	**Pro**	**To broaden the national legislature's veto power over states, giving it absolute veto power over all state laws.**
Vote 3	*Legislative Compensation*	*Pro*	*To adopt a clause allowing national legislators to determine their own compensation instead of adopting a clause specifying fixed stipends determined by the states.*
Vote 4	State Ratification	Anti	To strike a clause specifying direct election of delegates to state ratifying assemblies and replace it with a clausespecifying ratification by state legislatures.
Vote 5	**Debtor Legislators**	**Anti**	**To disqualify individuals indebted to the national government (public debtors) from serving as national legislators.**
Vote 6	**Congressional Quorum**	**Anti**	**To set the quorum of the national legislature at no less than a majority, preventing passage of laws by a minority.**
Vote 7	**National Exports**	**Anti**	**To prohibit the national legislature from enacting export tariffs.**
Vote 8	**Militia Control**	**Pro**	**To give the national government the power to organize and arm state militias and to control the militias when they are called out at the national level.**
Vote 9	**State Credit**	**Pro**	**To prohibit states from issuing bills of credit.**
Vote 10	State Restrictions	Pro	To prohibit states from passing any bills of attainder or ex post facto laws.
Vote 11	Trade Embargoes	Pro	To prohibit states from enacting trade embargoes.
Vote 12	State Imports	Pro	To strengthen an existing clause conditionally prohibiting state import tariffs, making the prohibition absolute.
Vote 13	State Exports	Pro	To add a prohibition on state export tariffs to an existing clause prohibiting state import tariffs.
Vote 14	**Navigation Acts**	**Anti**	**To consider a clause requiring a two-thirds majority for the national legislature to enact navigation acts.**
Vote 15	**Military Responsibility**	**Pro**	**To give the national government the responsibility for protecting each state from invasions and, at the request of the state government, for protecting each state from domestic violence.**
Vote 16	Amendment Clause	Anti	To strike a clause permitting the Constitution to be amended.

Note: Everything but the shorthand titles is from McGuire and Ohsfeldt (1986) Boldface type indicates the vote is included in our preferred model; italicized type indicates the vote is excluded due to inconsistencies in the record.

FIGURE 1 Scatter Plot of Delegates' Total Number of Children on the Proportion of Sons



could expect his posterity to be active and involved participants in the empire that the fledgling United States was attempting to build. A delegate with more sons could more easily anticipate his children's opportunities in the new government and surrounding society. A delegate with more daughters, in contrast, might well have strong familial connections to the next generation leading America, but no direct heirs would be holding those offices.

Our principal source for data about the sons and daughters of delegates is McKenney's (2013) *Women of the Constitution*. In briefly sketching the lives of the framer's wives, McKenney employs dozens of primary sources to aggregate basic information—including sex, birth dates, and death dates—for the children of the delegates to the Convention. This allows us to ascertain the number and gender of the children for each delegate. Where possible, we also cross-checked McKenney's information with other sources to ensure accuracy and we found no serious discrepancies. We catalogued a total of 145 children delegate children to the Convention—67 sons and 78 daughters. To our knowledge, ours is the first collection of such information in a single database.

We note that our calculation of the numbers of sons and daughters only counts legitimate children that were alive in 1787.[12] This is in keeping with our theoretical framework that the framers were considering the futures of the children that they had at the moment of the Convention. Sons that had died in infancy, for instance, could never rise to positions of power. And while it is possible that some delegates anticipated having additional children after the Convention, the uncertainty of whether those children would be sons or daughters remained, giving no indication one way or the other of what they should expect about their family's potential stakes in the new empire.

To give a visual summary of our independent variable's distribution, Figure 1 displays a scatter plot charting each delegate's total number of children and the proportion of those children that were sons. For example, Alexander Hamilton had three children at the time of the convention (Phillip, Angelica, and James Alexander), and two of those three were sons. Though the sample size is small, the distribution of both total children and proportion of sons appears to be fairly normal. Childless delegates (e.g., James Madison) are plotted here as having a neutral proportion value of 0.5. (Note: points are not jittered and do overlay one another).

Notably, this new data also makes important corrections to previous counts of the total number of children employed in past econometric models of the Convention.

[12]Though reliable information on this is hard to come by, there are a few confirmed cases of delegates having illegitimate children. However, including illegitimate children in our models did not substantially affect the results, and we ultimately opted not to include them because of the difficulty of identifying them and confirming their birth dates and gender.

For example, assuming that the total number of children should also only include children alive in 1787, McGuire and Ohsfeldt's (1986) accounting of each delegate's total number of children has the correct count in only ten of the fifty-five cases. The totals for the other forty-five delegates are incorrect, implying strong reasons to reexamine the data on delegates' children used in other literature.

Methods

Child gender is a uniquely useful independent variable because it is a randomly created natural experiment prior to the Convention. Random assignment goes a long way to satisfying the requirements of causal inference. Given that the children are both causally prior to the votes cast at the Convention, and that child gender is an exogenous shock to their vote choice, we can infer that correlations that we may find between the two variables are at least plausibly causally related.

However, although child gender is randomly assigned, it is not perfectly balanced in our small sample, and it could therefore be correlated by chance with other factors that could have affected delegates' preferences vis-à-vis the new government. Consequently, our preferred model also includes several variables drawn from McGuire and Ohsfeldt (1986) (see also McGuire 2003) to serve as controls. As with most economic models of the Convention, limited information requires the use of some estimate and proxy measures. Importantly, the results of our models remain consistent across various other model specifications.

First, we control for the age of the delegates. Age is a proxy for both personal ideology and the age of children. There is some evidence that younger delegates to the Convention were slightly more open to reform (Elkins and McKittrick 1961). The age of the delegate is important because it might be easier for delegates further along in life with older families to see sons as nascent leaders than at an early stage. Second, we control for whether the delegate was a Revolutionary War officer. This is another proxy for ideology and also for societal status—the elites who often became officers would have more reason to expect their sons to obtain lofty stations in the new government (Rutland 1966). Third, we control for the number of slaves personally owned by the delegates (Dougherty and Heckelman 2008). This serves to measure wealth, status, and personal ideology related to the form that the new empire would take. Fourth, we control for the distance from the delegate's home to the nearest navigable water. This is a proxy for cosmopolitanism, which would indicate how much a delegate saw his sons as potentially being part of a larger community, and the access and proximity that a delegate's family would have to that larger world (McGuire 2003). Fifth, we control for private and public securities holdings, as well as debt, as an approximate of delegate wealth (Beard 1913 and McGuire 2003). Wealthier delegates would have more reason to expect their sons to hold positions of power in the new government. Finally, we control for whether the delegate was a politician or lawyer. Then, as now, these two professions were suggestive of a higher probability that a delegate's sons would follow his footsteps and hold government office or at least exert public influence.

One important caveat here is that random assignment of child gender is conditional upon the choice to have children at all. Of course, birth control methods were certainly less well-known and sophisticated in the 18th Century than they are now, which subtracts at least some degree of intentionality from the choice to have a child. However, the choice to have children might be endogenous to causal mechanisms influencing delegate preferences. Parents who lack boys may have had more and more children in an effort to produce a male heir. The appendix deals with this in two ways. First, by examining whether or not the presence of *any* male child makes a difference (p. 7), and, second, by using a model that uses proportion of boys as a predictor so avoiding the endogeneity issue of the number of children (p. 10). This model is slightly less easy to interpret given our hypotheses, but is presented there for completeness and transparency. The results are broadly consistent with our child-count model, which suggests that the effect of child gender is not causally conditional on the choice to have children.

Empirical Results

Main Results

Columns two through nine of Table 2 present the results of a series of models for each of these labeled set of votes. In seven of the eight models the coefficient on both sons and daughters is in the expected direction. Moreover, the coefficient for sons shows statistical significance in five of the eight models. Column one aggregates the specific votes into an index and displays a count model for the eight-item index (the presented model is a Poisson regression, although other models such as a simple OLS regression obtain similar results). The logic here is similar to that found in McGuire where a series of votes are aggregated to create an index. This index measure is positively associated with the number of

TABLE 2 Models of vote index and individual votes

VARIABLES	Preferred Index	National Veto	Debtor Legislators	Cong. Quorum	National Exports	Militia Control	State Credit	Navigation Acts	Military Responsibility
Coefficient in expected direction?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of sons	0.147***	0.134	1.022**	0.277	−0.181	0.460**	0.785***	0.494***	0.554***
	(0.037)	(0.168)	(0.397)	(0.195)	(0.236)	(0.199)	(0.280)	(0.163)	(0.200)
Number of daughters	−0.124***	−0.178	−0.210	−0.501**	0.190	−0.337*	−0.395*	−0.129	−0.556**
	(0.039)	(0.162)	(0.311)	(0.232)	(0.208)	(0.1763)	(0.233)	(0.168)	(0.218)
Age	−0.002	−0.021	−0.184	0.050	−0.051	−0.087	−0.223	−0.001	0.022
	(0.025)	(0.102)	(0.280)	(0.111)	(0.097)	(0.134)	(0.218)	(0.112)	(0.114)
Age squared	0.0001	0.0003	0.002	−0.0001	0.0006	0.0007	0.003	0.0003	0.0002
	(0.0002)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.0013)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Revolutionary war officer	0.273**	0.067	1.531**	1.154**	0.337	0.789	0.724	0.888*	0.694
	(0.109)	(0.394)	(0.603)	(0.529)	(0.415)	(0.492)	(0.547)	(0.492)	(0.466)
Logged Number of slaves	−0.003***	−0.006	−0.013	−0.004	−0.015***	−0.006*	0.001	−0.009**	−0.007*
	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Distance to navigable coastline	−0.003**	0.003	−0.018**	−0.004	0.001	−0.008*	−0.009*	−0.009*	−0.009*
	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Public securities (1000s, 1787 dollars)	0.008	0.183*	−0.069	−0.210**	−0.088	−0.049	0.127	0.176	−0.032
	(0.032)	(0.105)	(0.171)	(0.102)	(0.099)	(0.114)	(0.113)	(0.116)	(0.110)
Private securities (1000s, 1787 dollars)	−0.0003	0.043	−0.067	−0.006	0.054*	−0.009	–	0.003	0.006
	(0.0037)	(0.034)	(0.046)	(0.024)	(0.030)	(0.029)	–	(0.036)	(0.041)
Debtor (dummy)	−0.721***	−0.313	−2.513***	0.342	–	−2.293**	−1.077**	−1.068*	−0.852
	(0.131)	(0.917)	(0.690)	(0.805)	–	(0.961)	(0.545)	(0.588)	(0.523)
Politician	0.107	0.898*	−0.965	−0.227	0.036	0.307	0.064	0.725	0.798
	(0.145)	(0.512)	(0.668)	(0.539)	(0.558)	(0.584)	(0.677)	(0.581)	(0.515)
Lawyer	0.098	1.101**	−0.986	−0.913	0.013	−0.425	0.827	0.855	0.445
	(0.116)	(0.473)	(0.679)	(0.608)	(0.539)	(0.594)	(0.620)	(0.551)	(0.558)
Constant	1.576*	−0.843	5.287	−0.145	1.207	3.558	4.481	−0.538	−0.288
	(0.626)	(2.518)	(5.821)	(2.776)	(2.458)	(3.499)	(4.812)	(2.781)	(2.810)
Observations	53	53	53	53	50	53	41	53	53

Note: Robust Standard errors in parentheses. Anti-national votes are inverted; we expect all "Number of sons" coefficients to be positive; All analyses are probit, except for the preferred index, which is poisson. All models presented here utilize robust standard errors. The broad conclusions are not significantly affected by this choice as can be seen in the replication materials.

***$p < 0.01$,

**$p < 0.05$,

*$p < 0.1$, – omitted due to perfect multicollinearity

sons at $p < 0.01$, indicating a strong relationship between delegates having sons and voting for measures designed to increase the scope and power of the national government.

The index measure is also negatively associated with having daughters at $p < 0.01$. As we discuss below, the lack of documentary evidence for the incentives created by daughters does not give us as clear a causal picture as we observe for sons. However, this effect is at least consistent with a few of the mechanisms we have hypothesized. For instance, because a delegate with more daughters had a stake in the future but was relatively uncertain of his family's place in it, he would be more risk-averse and therefore likely to balk at reform. Alternatively, fathers of daughters might have believed preferred to keep the nexus of government power local, where women—and consequently, their family—had greater opportunities to exercise influence through social relationships. Our Discussion section elaborates on these possibilities, as well as the difficulty in testing them directly.

Robustness Checks

Before turning to the substantive import of the results of our models, we discuss a number of robustness checks and alternative specifications on the main findings above.

Though the main results are in the expected direction of our hypothesis, there are reasons to question the McGuire and Ohsfeldt data used here. Heckelman and Dougherty (2007) scrutinized this data and offered some reasons to doubt the inferences drawn about individual delegate votes, mostly from attendance records. The original claim and maintained assumption of the authors who use this data may be that the delegates gave enough of an opinion over the course of the convention to draw an inference for these votes. However, the individual delegates may not have been present on the specific day on which the vote was held (though, of course, their "position" still may be intelligible based on the assumptions made by McDonald and McGuire). To deal with this complexity, the Appendix (Table A1, p. 6) presents models that omit delegates not in attendance and that reverse coding of votes Heckelman and Dougherty coded oppositely based on their work. The results are extremely similar to those presented in Table 2, as documented there with additional discussion of the data issues.

A second key assumption about our design is that the votes chosen for the index are chosen well. No doubt many statistically significant findings could be obtained—of exogenous measures like ours, or more endogenous measures—given time and enough specifications. To guard against that possibility, Table A5 (p. 12) presents a kind of sensitivity analysis to test the nature of the index's relationship with the number of sons and daughters for each given delegate. In all cases the coefficients for both sons and daughters remain in the expected direction, and they are both statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ for all indices. We interpret all of this as strong evidence that any choices about the vote inclusion is not key to the results, but rather that exogenous child gender is the key factor in these models.

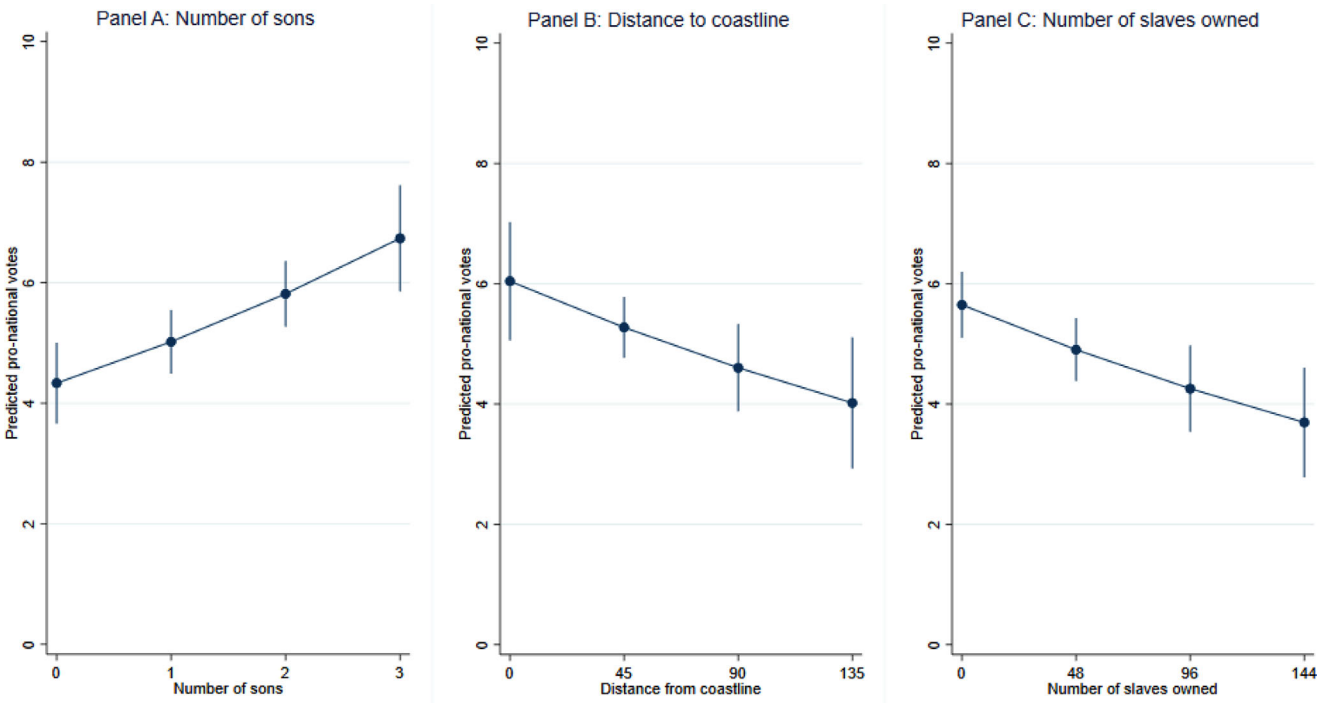
Substantive Significance

The magnitude of the effect is surprisingly large in both absolute and relative terms. The marginal effect of our preferred model is that each additional son is associated with a delegate being about 8 percent more likely to cast a pro-national ballot on any of the eight measures included in our index. (In contrast, each additional daughter is associated with a 5.5 percent drop in probability of casting a pro-national ballot.) This prediction means, for example, that a delegate with three sons would cast a pro-national ballot for two more (out of eight) of the votes than would a delegate who—all else equal—had no sons. As we discuss in our concluding section, this is a substantively significant effect that almost certainly influenced both the proceedings of the Convention and the final form of the Constitution.

In relative terms, too, we find that the effect of child gender is as large as or larger than that of any variable in the models, including the effects from some of the best-known factors of vote choice at the Convention. Figure 2 displays both the absolute and relative magnitude of the effect of child gender in graphical form. Panels A, B, and C plot the predicted number of pro-national votes (out of eight) by, respectively, number of sons, distance to navigable coastline, and number of slaves owned. The X-axis range runs from the 10^{th} to the 90^{th} percentile cases for each of the three predictive variables. In estimating these predictions, all other variables were held at their means. For all three variables, the estimated effect is of similar magnitude: a delegate at the 10^{th} percentile of the variable is predicted to vote differently on about two of the eight votes than a delegate at the 90^{th} percentile of the variable. While the confidence interval around the estimations do widen around the less common values of each of the variables, the effect size is large enough that the differences remain statistically significant.

In Table A6 of the Appendix (p. 14), we formally confirm these findings of child gender's relative magnitude

FIGURE 2 Predicted Value Plots (95% confidence intervals)



Note: For the sake of clarity the model presented in panel C uses the simple number of slaves, rather than the logged variable.

using an OLS regression with standardized coefficients. The effects of child gender appear to be comparable in magnitude to some of the most significant other influences on individual-level delegate preferences at the Convention: slave ownership, distance to navigable coastline, and officer experience in the Revolutionary War, indicating that child gender and the resultant family dynamics deserve a significant place in the story of the Constitution's final form.

Additional Evidence

Having exhausted the individual-level data for the small number of votes with hypothesized positions for all delegates, we turn to a simpler, if blunter, test of our theory concerning the overall position of the delegates on the Constitution. Did they sign or not sign? The nonsigners—anti-Federalists—had a number of reasons for their decision, although all of those reasons can largely be summarized as opposing the creation of a stronger more powerful national government without greater protections against tyranny like a bill of rights (Rakove 1996). Six delegates did not sign the Constitution and then opposed its ratification in their respective states: Elbridge Gerry (MA), Luther Martin (MD), John Lansing, Jr. (NY), George Mason (VA), John Francis Mercer (MD) and Robert Yates (NY).[13]

Table 3 presents a probit model predicting whether or not a delegate was an anti-Federalist. For consistency, the same control variables are used there as are used above, though revolutionary war officer, debtor and public securities are all dropped due to multicollinearity (there are, after all, only 53 observations and only two outcomes in this model). As can be seen in the table, delegates with larger numbers of sons were less likely to be anti-Federalists ($p < 0.01$) and those with more daughters were more likely to be anti-federalists ($p < 0.01$). The control variables generally look similar to estimates given in the previous models, lending confidence to our claim that this model is accurately capturing preferences about the Constitution as a whole. We recognize that a test of a small sample, with only six cases that are "successes" has its own set of limitations (the asymptotic assumptions are certainly open to question in this case). But while this test is certainly a blunt instrument, it is further evidence for our theory.

Finally, there remains the question of whether or not the delegates' sons in fact went on to actually hold

[13]This categorization omits those like Edmund Randolph who did not sign but then favored the Constitution in ratification, though the result does not change if Randolph is included.

TABLE 3 Probit Model of Anti-Federalism

Variables	*Anti-Federalist*
Number of sons	−2.254**
	(0.685)
Number of daughters	1.643**
	(0.447)
Age	−0.272
	(0.189)
Age squared	0.002
	(0.002)
Number of slaves	0.014*
	(0.006)
Distance to navigable coastline	−0.017*
	(0.008)
Private securities ($1000s, 1787 dollars)	0.141
	(0.089)
Politician	−1.404**
	(0.514)
Lawyer	−3.502**
	(1.211)
Constant	4.946
	(4.122)
Observations	53
Pseudo R^2	0.519

Standard errors in parentheses
**p<0.01;
*p < 0.05;
†p < 0.1

government office. While a comprehensive search of this question is beyond the scope of a single paper, we did analyze the Congressional Directory to see what percentage of all of a delegate's sons ended up entering Congress. According to the Directory, 12.2 percent of the delegates' sons entered either the House or the Senate. This represents the sons of about a quarter of the delegates in attendance at the Convention (slightly more if you drop delegates without any sons at the time). In 1800, the census records that 5,308,403 people lived in the United States. A naïve calculation would expect that for a single session of Congress only about five one-thousandths of one percent of the population (taking gender into account) could serve in a Congress of 138 individuals (32 Senators and 106 House members). Of course, this naïve calculation is probably wrong in some respects. The delegates to the Convention possessed surpassing political prominence and wealth, even among the social elites of the time. Regardless, the odds of a delegate's son serving in Congress were obviously far greater than for the population at large. And this is really only a lower bound. That 12.2 percent does not include consider military, bureaucratic, or judicial offices, many of which we know were also held by the sons of the delegates. In many cases, Congressional service was just the first national post of many for these sons, acting as a "springboard to further federal honors" (Amar 2005). We regard these findings as proof that the delegates' perception that their sons would inhabit the offices of their emergent empire was in fact quite prescient.

Discussion

We have tested the proposition that a delegate to the Federal Convention of 1787 was influenced by his family life—specifically the claim that the gender of the delegate's children mattered for voting on some of the key votes at the Convention where some scholars have argued that a complete set of individual delegate votes exists (though the text and the appendix present several alternative models where the result remains robust , see p. 11). The results give significant support for the claim that family life was an important influence. Fathers of more sons were more likely to the creation of a stronger national government. There is some evidence that fathers of more daughters typically lined up on the other side of those issues, favoring less reform and more adherence to state sovereignty, though we note that the evidence for this latter claim is weaker.

In our view, political science has not paid sufficient attention to the importance of family relationships. True, the literature on how parents, especially mothers, socialize their children's political attitudes is voluminous (e.g., Greenlee 2014). However, perhaps because of the normally significant endogeneity issues, studies of marital influence, siblings, or the idea that children influence parents has received comparatively much less attention. Our contribution here has been to take one element of that relationship that is plausibly exogenous and demonstrate that had a significant impact on the structure of the American government. Given the results, we feel confident in saying that child gender and the resultant family dynamics may have been one of the more important individual-level influences on votes at the convention.

Scholars sometimes speak of accidents of history and how large events sometimes turn on small hinges. Delegates' children are in one sense such an accident. To date, little attention has been given to the importance of family life on delegation voting, but our results suggest that it

mattered greatly that many of Founding Fathers were literal fathers too. For example, there is some reason to believe that the American national government was made less powerful and less centralized than it otherwise might have been because of the relatively large number of delegates at the convention who either had only daughters (essentially a quarter of them) or had no children at all (another third of the delegates). How might this have played out?

Because of the hierarchical voting structure of the Convention—delegates voted inside of delegations which then cast a delegation vote—it is difficult to conclusively prove that gender ratio flipped any particular votes. But it is quite plausible that they did. For instance, our examination of voting patterns indicates some of the votes at the Convention could have hinged on the preferences of the delegates who had only fathered daughters. Examining the record for all fourteen of the votes for which we have reliable data, for example, we find that in many cases, fathers of only daughters cast decisive votes in their delegations. In two votes (7 and 13), the substitution of pro-national votes for the votes of only-daughters delegates would have flipped enough delegations to change the ultimate outcome of those votes to a pro-national one. We make this point merely to illustrate the potential importance of this variable since a hard test on a wider number of votes, at least where we have the information for all delegates, is not available.

It is important to acknowledge that our vantage point, centuries later, does not allow us to fully interrogate the inner workings of the minds and desires of the delegates. Modern research cannot definitively prove the precise mechanism for the causal effects we observe. Based on our study of the unique context of American political elite families at the founding, coupled with the limited documentary indicators of the delegates' thought processes, we have rested our hypothesis largely on two sets of incentives: 1) that a larger and more powerful government created additional opportunities for career advancement for sons (but not daughters), and 2) a larger and more powerful government would be less threatening to fathers who, knowing their sons would control it, were less worried about the potential for abuse.

It is possible that other mechanisms are at play. For instance, fathers of daughters, in addition to lacking certain incentives that fathers of sons had, might have had affirmative inducements to prefer vesting government power in local rather than national institutions. For example, community social relationships—an area where women *were* substantially involved— often figured much more prominently in provincial politics than in national policymaking. Fathers of daughters might therefore have anticipated that their family's influence would be maximized if the locus of government power were local rather than national, and have voted accordingly at the convention. However, our review of the historical record has not disclosed any clear evidence of these alternative explanations. The fathers at the convention, consistent with the social norms among political elites of their time, seemed to have focused their attention more on their sons than their daughters, both in terms of seeking opportunities for influence and willingness to trust government with power generally. That said, these alternative mechanisms may very well be a fruitful avenue for future research into family life and its impact in the Founding era and beyond.

We see three implications of our findings. First, they add a novel dimension to our understanding of how personal interests played into decision-making at the Convention, especially ones that scholars may have dismissed as irrelevant or important. While we agree with Jillson (2002) that hard distinctions between interests and ideas as forces that shaped voting are sometimes overdrawn in the literature (or at least dependent on the level of decision-making at the Convention), these results do imply that deep personal and familial motivations should be considered in our assessment of the Convention's results. There is a sense in which the motivation described here is selfish, but it is also a motivation based on delegates' concern for their posterity.

Second, this is, to our knowledge, the first attempt to offer an explanation of the Constitution's drafting process that is rooted specifically in gender. Many explanations have been offered about modern role of gender in barriers in political participation and policy outcomes (Lawless 2004). Without attempting to solve any of the thorny problems of causality or measurement in that literature, our contribution is to note that stereotypical gender attitudes helped create our republic's form of government. When John Adams replies to Abigail's (1776) plea that the delegates to the Continental Congress should "[r]emember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors," he says "We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems … We are obliged to go fair, and softly, and in Practice you know We are the subjects." John Adams exemplifies his generation in that he may have respected women in their prescribed roles—but he, like his countrymen, assumed that women would not be a part of the public political life of the future. Gender merits further consideration in the literature on women's participation in and exclusion from politics.

Finally, these results show that the transformative effect of family life—and gender dynamics within

families—deserves more attention from political scientists. When historians have studied the subject they have found family to be very important in the past (Riley 2014 and Zagarri 2013). We should not limit our attention only to socialization from one generation to the next, but should pay more attention to the effects of children on parents. These results demonstrate that in at least one very important context the experience of family life probably had an effect that echoes through centuries. It seems likely that the very scaffolding of the U.S. government was shaped, at least in part, by the intra-family gender dynamics and expectations of the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

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Appendix B: Additional literature on the importance of family
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Appendix D: Attendance/Vote Adjustments
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Appendix G: Sensitivity analysis: alternative Indices
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