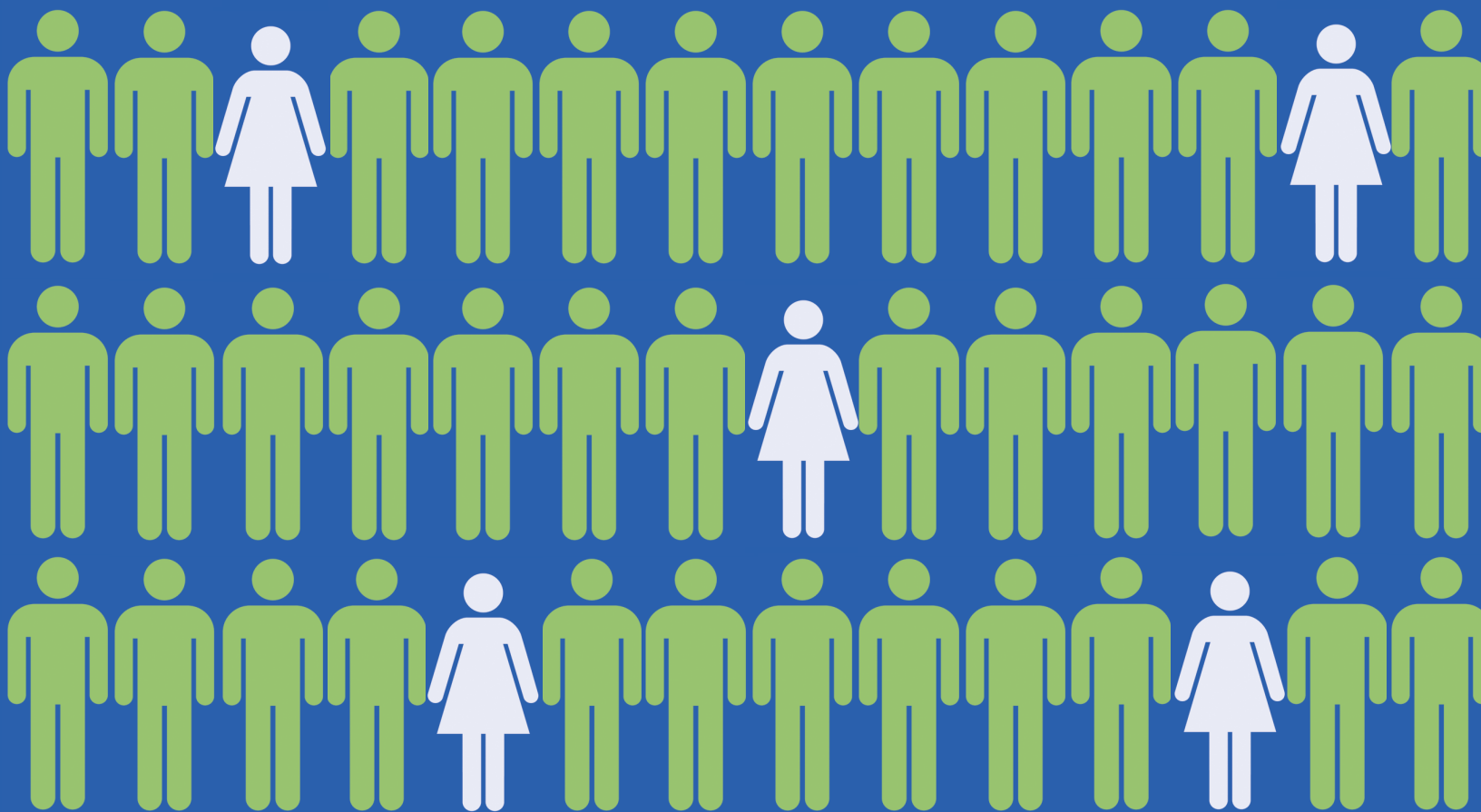


# Men Rule

The Continued Under-Representation  
of Women in U.S. Politics



**Jennifer L. Lawless**  
American University

**Richard L. Fox**  
Loyola Marymount University

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Jennifer L. Lawless  
Associate Professor of Government  
American University

Richard L. Fox  
Associate Professor of Political Science  
Loyola Marymount University

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## Executive Summary

Study after study finds that, when women run for office, they perform just as well as their male counterparts. No differences emerge in women and men's fundraising receipts, vote totals, or electoral success. Yet women remain severely under-represented in U.S. political institutions. We argue that the fundamental reason for women's under-representation is that they do not run for office. There is a substantial gender gap in political ambition; men tend to have it, and women don't.

We arrive at this conclusion by analyzing data from a brand new survey of nearly 4,000 male and female "potential candidates" – lawyers, business leaders, educators, and political activists, all of whom are well-situated to pursue a political candidacy – and comparing our results to a survey we conducted in 2001. Despite the emergence over the past ten years of high-profile women in politics, such as Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin, we find that the gender gap in political ambition is virtually the same as it was a decade ago. The gender gap in interest in a future candidacy has actually increased.

Ultimately, we identify seven factors that contribute to the gender gap – either by directly impeding women's political ambition, or by making the decision calculus far more complex and complicated for women than men:

- 1. Women are substantially more likely than men to perceive the electoral environment as highly competitive and biased against female candidates.**
- 2. Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin's candidacies aggravated women's perceptions of gender bias in the electoral arena.**
- 3. Women are much less likely than men to think they are qualified to run for office.**
- 4. Female potential candidates are less competitive, less confident, and more risk averse than their male counterparts.**
- 5. Women react more negatively than men to many aspects of modern campaigns.**
- 6. Women are less likely than men to receive the suggestion to run for office – from anyone.**
- 7. Women are still responsible for the majority of childcare and household tasks.**

Given the persistent gender gap in political ambition, we are a long way from a political reality in which women and men are equally likely to aspire to attain high level elective office. To be sure, both major political parties are running a record number of female candidates for the U.S. Senate in 2012. But women, assuming they win their primaries, will still compete in fewer than one-third of all races. Thus, even if 2012 is a "banner year" for female candidates, it will likely still amount only to a 1 to 2 percentage point increase in number of women serving in the U.S. Congress.

Certainly, recruiting female candidates and disseminating information about the electoral environment can help narrow the gender gap in ambition and increase women's representation. But many barriers to women's interest in running for office can be overcome only with major cultural and political changes. In the end, this report documents how far from gender parity we remain, as well as the barriers and obstacles we must still surmount in order to achieve it.

# Men Rule: The Continued Under-Representation of Women in U.S. Politics

As of the 1970s, women occupied almost no major elective positions in U.S. political institutions. Ella Grasso, a Democrat from Connecticut, and Dixie Lee Ray, a Democrat from Washington, served as the only two women elected governor throughout the decade. Not until 1978 did Kansas Republican Nancy Kassebaum become the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate in her own right. By 1979, women comprised fewer than five percent of the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, and only about ten percent of state legislative positions across the country.

Today, if we glance at the television screen, peruse the newspaper, listen to the radio, or scan the Internet, we might be tempted to conclude that women have made remarkable gains. Nancy Pelosi currently serves as the Minority Leader in the U.S. House of Representatives. Secretary of State (and former U.S. Senator) Hillary Clinton not only received 18 million votes when she sought the Democratic nomination for president, but she also has the highest favorability ratings of any member of the Obama Administration. And in 2011, polls repeatedly placed former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin in the top tier of potential candidates for the Republican presidential nomination.

But these famous faces obscure the dearth of women who hold elective office in the United States. When the 112th Congress convened in January 2011, 84 percent of its members were men. The percentages of women office holders presented in Table 1 demonstrate that it is not only at the federal level that women are numerically under-represented. Large gender disparities are also evident at the state and local levels, where more than three-quarters of statewide elected officials and state legislators are men. Further, men occupy the governor's mansion in 44 of the 50 states, and men run City Hall in 92 of the 100 largest cities across the country.

**Table 1**

## Women Office Holders in the United States Office

Office	Percent Women
U.S. Senators	17.0
Members of the U.S. House of Representatives	16.8
State Governors	12.0
Statewide Elected Officials	22.4
State Legislators	23.6
Mayors of the 100 Largest Cities	8.0

Sources: Women & Politics Institute, American University; and Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University.

The low numbers of women in politics are particularly glaring when we place them in context. Whereas the 1980s saw gradual, but steady increases in the percentage of women seeking elected office, and the early 1990s experienced a sharper surge, the last several election cycles can be characterized as a plateau. Indeed, the 2010 congressional elections resulted in the first net decrease in the

percentage of women serving in the U.S. House of Representatives since the 1978 midterm elections. The number of women elected to state legislatures, which act as key launching pads to higher office, also suffered the largest single year decline in 2010.

Moreover, while many nations around the world make progress increasing women's presence in positions of political power, the United States has not kept pace; 90 nations now surpass the U.S. in the percentage of women in the national legislature (see Table 2). Certainly, cultural and political compo-

nents factor into the total number of women who hold seats in any nation's legislature, but more than 50 democratic countries rank higher than the United States in women's representation.

**Table 2**  
**Worldwide Rankings of Women**  
**in the National Legislature**

Rank and Country	Percent Women
1. Rwanda	56.3
2. Andorra	53.6
3. Sweden	45.0
4. South Africa	44.5
5. Cuba	43.2
6. Iceland	42.9
7. Finland	42.5
8. Norway	39.6
9. Belgium	39.3
Netherlands	39.3
11. Mozambique	39.2
12. Angola	38.6
Costa Rica	38.6
14. Argentina	38.5
15. Denmark	38.0
16. Spain	36.6
17. Tanzania	36.0
18. Uganda	34.9
19. New Zealand	33.6
20. Nepal	33.2
91. United States of America	16.9
International Average	19.3

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments," as of August 31, 2011.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that women's under-representation in American politics raises grave concerns regarding democratic legitimacy and fundamental issues of political representation. Electing more women increases the likelihood that policy debates and deliberations include women's views and experiences. Further, political theorists and practitioners alike often ascribe symbolic or role model benefits to a more diverse body of elected officials (see Appendix A for current research on the substantive and symbolic benefits female candidates and elected officials bring to the political sphere).

In light of the importance of women's presence in politics, it is critical to understand why so few women hold public office in the United States. Somewhat surprisingly, it is not because of discrimination against female candidates. In fact, women perform as well as men when they run for office. In terms of fundraising and vote totals, the consensus among researchers is the absence of overt gender bias on Election Day. When women run for office – regardless of the position they seek – they are just as likely as their male counterparts to win their races.<sup>1</sup>

We argue that the fundamental reason for women’s under-representation is that they do not run for office. There is a substantial gender gap in political ambition; men tend to have it, and women don’t.<sup>2</sup> And the gender gap in ambition is persistent and unchanging. We arrive at this conclusion by analyzing data we collected in 2001 and 2011 from thousands of male and female “potential candidates” – lawyers, business leaders, educators, and political activists, all of whom are well-situated to pursue a political candidacy. In addition to highlighting the persistent gender gap in political ambition, we identify seven factors that continue to hinder women’s full entrance into electoral politics. In the end, this report documents how far from gender parity we remain and the barriers and obstacles we must still overcome in order to achieve it.

## Studying Political Ambition

In order to reconcile the contradiction between a political system that elects few women and an electoral environment that is unbiased against female candidates, we developed and conducted the Citizen Political Ambition Study, a series of mail surveys and interviews with women and men in the pool of potential candidates. Our goal was to conduct a nuanced investigation of how women and men initially decide to run for all levels and types of political office, either now or in the future.<sup>3</sup>

The original survey, carried out in 2001, served as the first national study of the initial decision to run for office. Based on mail survey responses from 1,969 men and 1,796 women, we concluded that women were less likely than their male counterparts to consider running for office and that, across generations, men expressed more comfort and felt greater freedom than women when thinking about seeking office.<sup>4</sup>

**“We argue that the fundamental reason for women’s under-representation is that they do not run for office. There is a substantial gender gap in political ambition; men tend to have it, and women don’t.”**

But a lot has happened in the last ten years. The events of September 11, 2001, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Nancy Pelosi’s election as the first female Speaker of the House, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama’s 2008 battle for the Democratic presidential nomination, Sarah Palin’s vice presidential candidacy, and the rise of the Tea Party movement are only among the many recent developments that might affect interest in running for office. For some people, the current political climate might motivate them to take action. For others, the effect might be increased cynicism and disengagement from politics. In either case, the altered political landscape, coupled with the continuing need to understand why women do not run for office, motivated us to conduct a new wave of the Citizen Political Ambition Study.

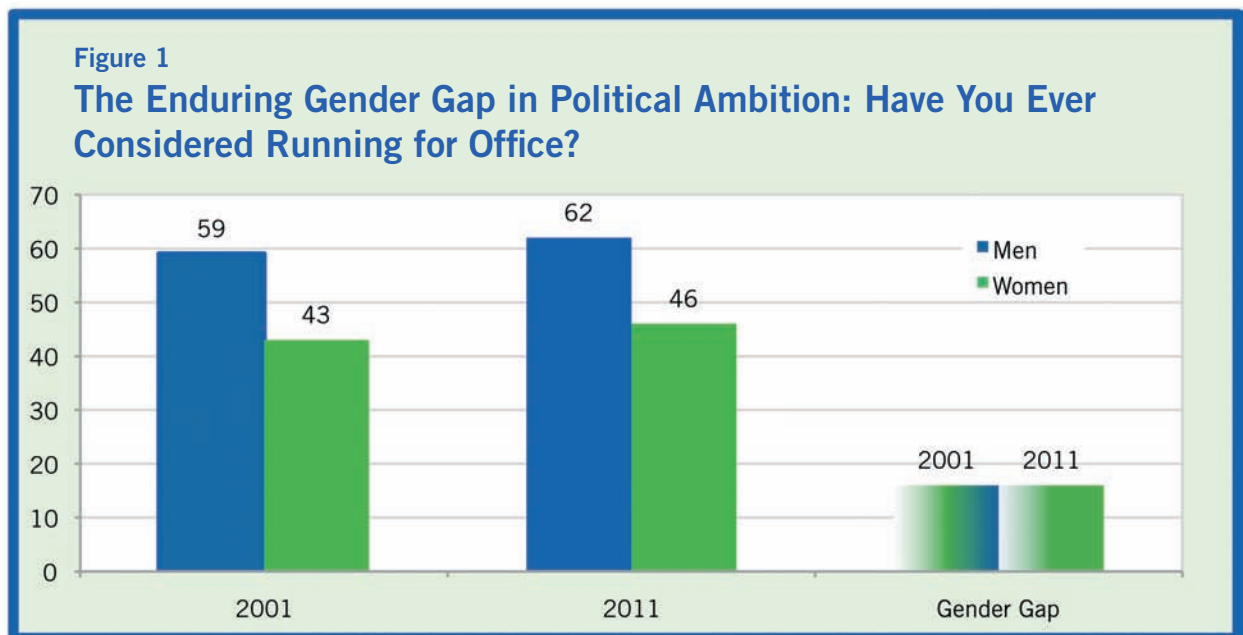
In 2011, we completed a survey of a new sample of potential candidates. The samples of women and men are roughly equal in terms of race, region, education, household income, profession, political participation, and interest in politics (see Appendix B for a description of the sampling procedures and response rates). Thus, our sample of 1,925 men and 1,843 women allows us to shed new light on the gender gap in political ambition.

## The Persistent Gender Gap in Political Ambition

Put simply, men and women do not have equal interest in seeking elective office. In the 2001 survey, we found strong evidence that gender plays a substantial role in the candidate emergence process.

Overall, more than half of the respondents (51 percent) stated that the idea of running for an elective position had at least “crossed their mind.” Turning to the respondents who considered a candidacy, though, the data presented in Figure 1 highlight a significant gender gap among the 2001 respondents: men were 16 percentage points more likely than women to have considered running for office.<sup>5</sup> Notably, this gender gap persisted across political party, income level, age, race, profession, and region.<sup>6</sup>

The political environment may have changed throughout the last decade, but the gender gap in political ambition in 2011 is striking, and just as large as it was a decade ago (see the center columns in Figure 1). Remarkably, despite the changing political landscape and the emergence of several high-profile female candidates between 2001 and 2011, women remain 16 percentage points less likely than men to have thought about running for office.

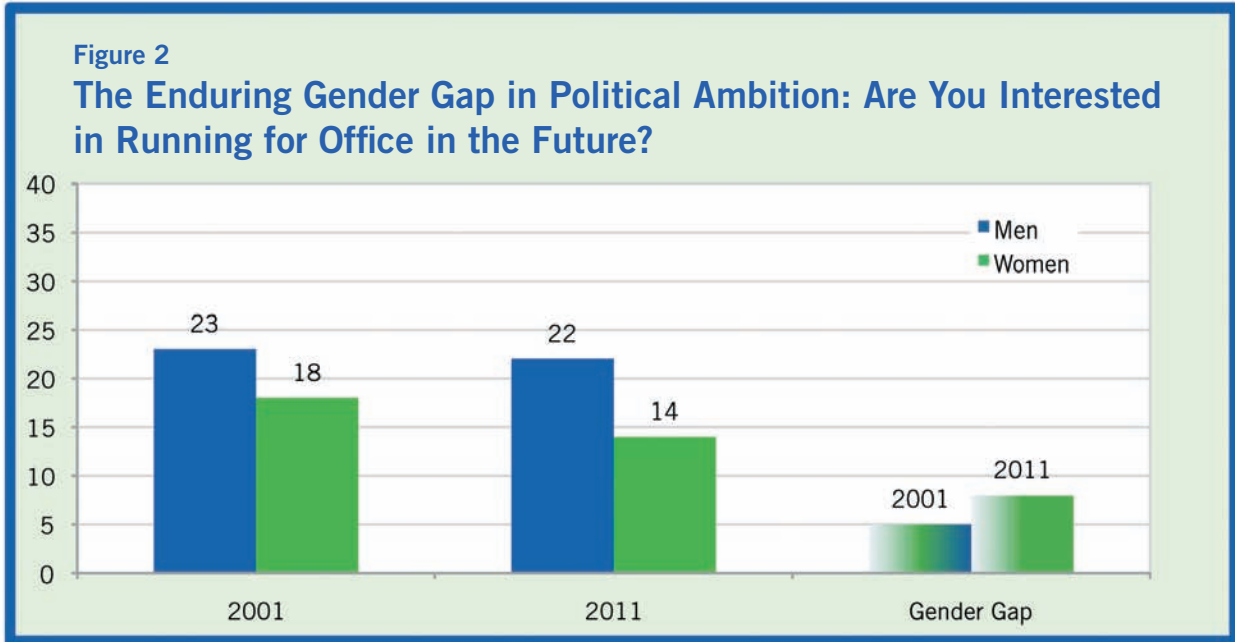


Notes: Bars represent the percentage of women and men who responded that they had “seriously considered” or “considered” running for office (this includes respondents who actually ran for office). The gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$  in both the 2001 and 2011 comparisons.

**“The political environment may have changed throughout the last decade, but the gender gap in political ambition in 2011 is striking, and just as large as it was a decade ago.”**

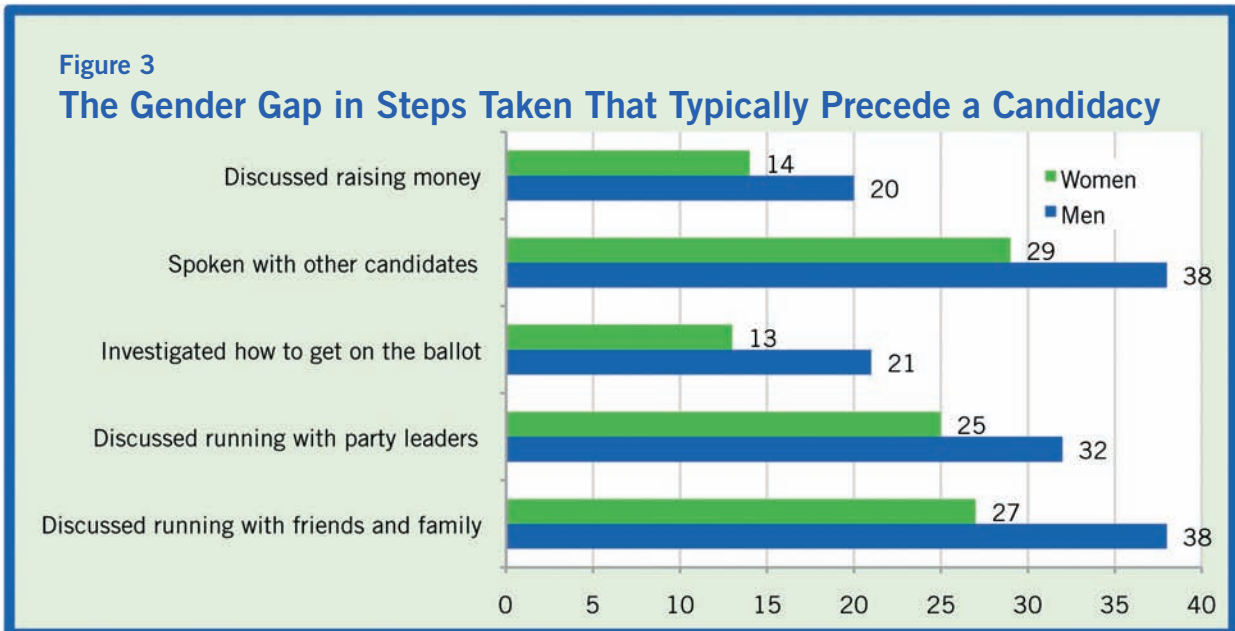
When we turn to future interest in office-holding, the prospects for women’s full inclusion in electoral politics are even bleaker. Figure 2 demonstrates that the gender gap in future interest in running for office has actually grown over the course of the last ten years. More specifically, while men’s interest in a future candidacy remained virtually unchanged across the ten year period, women’s interest dropped; 18 percent of women in 2001, compared to 14 percent of women in 2011, expressed interest in running for office at some point in the future.





Notes: Bars represent the percentage of women and men who responded that they were “definitely” interested in running for office at some point in the future, or that they would be interested “if the opportunity presented itself.” The gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$  in both the 2001 and 2011 comparisons.

Women are not only less likely than men to consider a candidacy – both retrospectively and prospectively – but they are also less likely than men to take any of the steps required to launch an actual political campaign. Figure 3 reveals that men are significantly more likely than women to have investigated how to place their name on the ballot, discussed running with party or community leaders, or spoken with family members, friends, and potential supporters about a possible candidacy.



Notes: Bars represent the percentage of women and men who answered affirmatively for each activity. The gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$  for all comparisons.

Finally, if we turn to the specific offices in which respondents express interest, then we uncover another dimension of the gender gap in political ambition. When prompted to consider running for office, women and men do not express comparable levels of interest in all positions (see Table 3). At the local level, women are more likely than men to report interest in a school board position. But men are approximately 40 percent more likely than women to consider running for the state legislature. And men are roughly twice as likely as women to express interest in a federal position.

The 2011 gender gap in political ambition – based on a variety of measures – is roughly the same magnitude as it was in 2001. Women today remain just as unlikely, relative to men, as women ten years ago to consider running for office. The remainder of this report sheds light on why this may be the case and speaks to seven gender dynamics in the political arena that work to women’s detriment.

**Table 3**  
**Gender Differences in Office Preferences**

	Women	Men
<b>Local or Community Office</b>		
School Board	35% *	26%
City Council	30	32
Mayor	7 *	11
District Attorney	3	2
<b>State Level Office</b>		
State Legislator	25 *	35
Statewide Office (i.e., State Treasurer)	2	3
Governor	3 *	6
<b>Federal Office</b>		
House of Representatives	9 *	19
Senate	6 *	11
President	1 *	2
Sample Size	1,766	1,848

Notes: Entries indicate the percentage of respondents who would ever consider running for each position. Percentages do not add up to 100 percent because respondents often expressed interest in more than one position. \* indicates that the gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$ .

## Seven Factors that Hinder Prospects for Gender Parity in Elective Office

The following seven findings highlight the difficult road ahead as the United States continues the climb toward gender parity in elective office. Several of the findings link directly to political ambition and gender differences in women and men’s perceptions of themselves as candidates. Others tap into the more complex set of factors women face when contemplating a candidacy. But all seven demonstrate that because of deeply embedded patterns of gender roles and norms, becoming a candidate will remain a far less appealing and feasible option for women than men, at least for the foreseeable future.

## 1. Women are substantially more likely than men to perceive the electoral environment as highly competitive and biased against female candidates.

As we mentioned at the outset of this report, when women run for office, they are just as likely as men to win their races. The reality of gender neutral election outcomes, however, may not mitigate the gendered perceptual lens through which women view the electoral process. That is, if women think the system is biased against them, then the empirical reality of a playing field on which women can succeed is almost meaningless. And this is exactly what we find.

To shed light on gender differences in perceptions of the electoral system, we asked respondents the extent to which they regard their local and congressional election landscapes competitive. Because the women and men are geographically matched, differences in responses reflect perceptual, not actual, differences in levels of competition. The data presented in the top half of Table 4 indicate that a majority of women judge their local and congressional elections as “highly competitive.” Women are roughly 25 percent more likely than men to assess the political landscape this way.

Table 4

### Gender Differences in Perceptions of the Electoral Environment

	Women	Men
<b>Perceptions of the Electoral Environment</b>		
In the area I live, local elections are highly competitive.	55%	39%
In the area I live, congressional elections are highly competitive.	62	50
<b>General Perceptions of Bias Against Women in Politics</b>		
Women running for office win as often as similarly situated men.	47	58
Women running for office raise as much money as similarly situated men.	27	40
Sample Size	1,753	1,833

Notes: Entries indicate the percentage of respondents who answered affirmatively. The gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$  for all comparisons.

Further, more than half the women in the sample do not believe that women who run for office fare as well as their male counterparts. Seven out of ten women doubt that female candidates raise as much money as similarly situated men. Men are significantly more likely than women to perceive lower levels of both electoral competition and gender bias against women in politics.

There may be no systematic bias against female candidates on Election Day, but the aggregate percentages of women and men who perceive a biased system are striking. And as far as considering a candidacy is concerned, perceptions often trump reality.

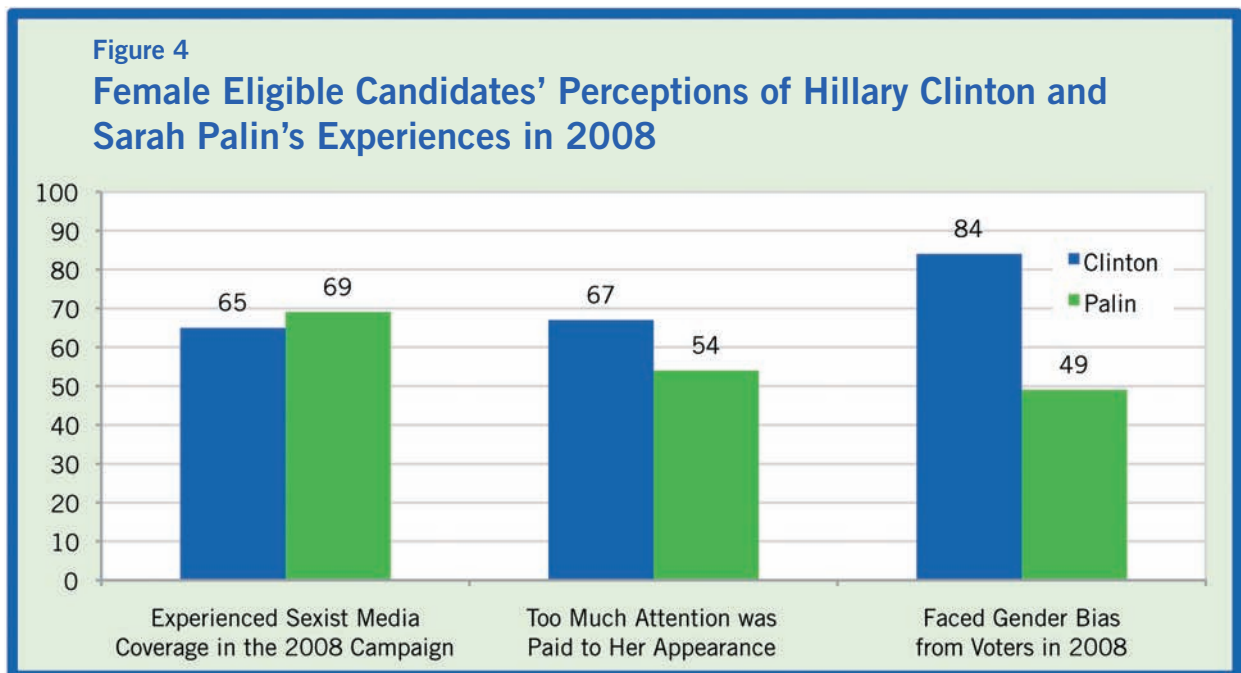
## 2. Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin’s candidacies aggravated women’s perceptions of gender bias in the electoral arena.

When Hillary Clinton announced her presidential candidacy at the end of 2007, she became the first female presidential candidate who was regarded as a frontrunner with a chance to win her party’s nomination. In fact, her hotly contested battle with eventual winner Barack Obama dominated political news coverage for the first five months of 2008. Sarah Palin’s 2008 vice-presidential candidacy also propelled

a woman into the spotlight. As the second female vice presidential candidate – Geraldine Ferraro was Walter Mondale’s running mate in 1984 – and the first Republican, Palin garnered widespread attention.

Although Clinton and Palin shared little in terms of their political preferences, they both regularly referenced the manner in which their victories would be historic. On June 7, 2008, for example, when Hillary Clinton took to the podium for what would be her last speech as a presidential candidate, she spoke very openly about what her candidacy meant for women’s political progress: “You can be so proud that, from now on, it will be unremarkable for a woman to win primary state victories, unremarkable to have a woman in a close race to be our nominee, unremarkable to think that a woman can be the President of the United States. And that is truly remarkable.”<sup>7</sup> Nearly three months later, during her first speech as the Republican Party’s vice presidential candidate, Sarah Palin uttered very similar words. She reminded her supporters at a Dayton, Ohio, rally that “Hillary left 18 million cracks in the highest, hardest glass ceiling in America. But it turns out that the women of America aren’t finished yet, and we can shatter that glass ceiling once and for all.”<sup>8</sup>

But Clinton and Palin’s campaigns also provided many potential candidates with a window into how women are treated when they run for office. And what women of both political parties saw likely confirmed some of their worst fears about the electoral arena. More specifically, the data presented in Figure 4 reveal that roughly two-thirds of female potential candidates believe that Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin were subjected to sexist media coverage. Further, majorities of female respondents contend that, during the campaigns, too much attention was paid to Clinton and Palin’s appearances. In terms of perceptions of bias, roughly half of the female potential candidates believe that Sarah Palin faced gender bias from voters; more than 80 percent feel the same way about Hillary Clinton.<sup>9</sup>



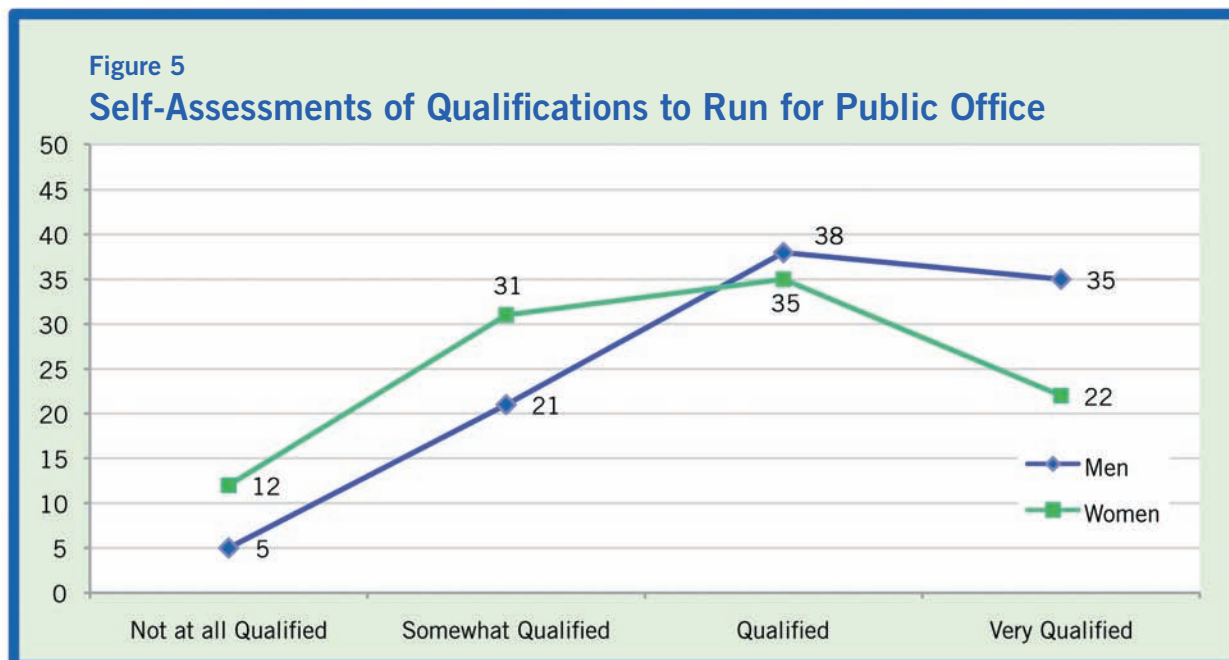
Notes: Bars represent the percentage of women who agreed with each statement. For all categories, women were statistically more likely than men (at  $p < .05$ ) to contend that Clinton and Palin experienced sexist treatment and / or gender bias (comparisons with men not shown).

Overall, to the degree that Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin’s high-profile candidacies served as a civic education project about women who run for office, they appear to have reinforced, or perhaps exacerbated, negative perceptions of the way women are received in the electoral arena.

### 3. Women are much less likely than men to think they are qualified to run for office.

Our 2001 study revealed that one of the biggest barriers keeping women from emerging as candidates centered around self-perceptions of qualifications to run for office. In 2011, the same dynamic emerges. Consistent with the findings from ten years ago, the data presented in Figure 5 indicate that men remain almost 60 percent more likely than women to assess themselves as “very qualified” to run for office. Women in the sample are more than twice as likely as men to rate themselves as “not at all qualified.”

Importantly, the gender gap in perceptions of qualifications to run for office does not stem from gender differences in direct political experiences or exposure to, and familiarity with, the political arena. Twenty-three percent of women and 26 percent of men have conducted extensive policy research; 69 percent of women and 74 percent of men regularly engage in public speaking; and 75 percent of women and 70 percent of men report experience soliciting funds. In addition, more than 80 percent of the women and men in the sample have attended political meetings and events. Two-thirds have served on the boards of non-profit organizations and foundations. And roughly three-quarters have interacted with elected officials in some professional capacity.



Notes: Entries indicate the percentage of women and men who self-assess at each level of qualifications to run for office. The gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$  for all comparisons.

Women’s self-doubts are important not only because they speak to deeply embedded gendered perceptions, but also because they play a much larger role than do men’s in depressing the likelihood of considering a candidacy. More specifically, among women who self-assess as “not at all qualified” to run for office, only 39 percent have considered throwing their hats into the ring. Among men who do not think they are qualified to run for office, 55 percent have given the notion of a candidacy some thought. Because gender differences in perceptions of qualifications correlate with respondents’ assessments of their own electoral prospects, women are significantly less likely than men to think they would win their first campaign. Thirty-one percent of female potential candidates, compared to 38 percent of men, think it would be “likely” or “very likely” that they would win their first race if they ran for office. Alternatively, women are approximately 50 percent more likely than men to think the odds of winning their first race would be “very unlikely.”

Certainly, because women are more likely than men to view the electoral process as biased against them, self-doubt regarding their qualifications and more pessimistic perceptions of the likelihood of winning may simply be a rational response to what women perceive as a more challenging political context. But the overwhelming majority of people – women and men – do not run for office unless they believe that they have a chance of winning. Hence, women’s lower self-assessments carry direct consequences for their numeric representation.

#### 4. Female potential candidates are less competitive, less confident, and more risk averse than their male counterparts.

Entering the electoral arena involves the courageous step of putting oneself before the public, often only to face intense examination, loss of privacy, possible rejection, and disruption from regular routines and pursuits. This decision, even for experienced politicians, requires character traits such as confidence,

competitiveness, and risk-taking – characteristics that men have traditionally been encouraged to embrace and women to eschew. As the data presented in Table 5 reveal, women are significantly less likely than men to report that they have the traits that are generally required of candidates for elective office. In terms of thick skin, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a willingness to take risks, men are at least 25 percent more likely than women to believe that they possess the political trait in question.

**Table 5**  
**Self Assessment of Politically-Relevant Traits**

Do you consider yourself . . . ?

	Women	Men	Male Advantage
Confident	66%	73%	+ 7
Competitive	64	74	+ 10
Risk-Taking	31	39	+ 8
Entrepreneurial	26	36	+ 10
Thick-Skinned	24	33	+ 9
Sample Size	1,745	1,846	

Notes: The gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$  for all comparisons.

**Table 6**  
**Potential Candidates’ Self-Assessments of Risk Aversion and Competitiveness**

	Women	Men
A trusted friend or colleague comes to you with a risky investment opportunity. There is a 50 percent chance that you could quadruple your money over two years, but there is a 50 percent chance that you would lose your investment. How likely are you to invest in this opportunity?	17%	25%
When playing a game with a colleague or friend (tennis, golf, cards), how competitive are you? That is, how important is it to you that you win the game?	53	64
Sample Size	1,732	1,826

Notes: Entries indicate the percentage of respondents who answered each question by responding “likely” or “very likely,” or “important,” or “very important.” The gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$  for both comparisons.

The same pattern persists when we move from abstract self-assessments of traits to specific scenarios that tap into risk aversion and competitiveness. When presented with a risky investment opportunity, for

instance, men are approximately 50 percent more likely than women to report that they would be willing to take the risk because of the potential payoff (see Table 6). Men are more than 20 percent more likely than women to report that winning a low-stakes game with a friend or colleague is important.

These findings suggest that men’s longer presence and success in top positions in the professions from which candidates tend to emerge may result in (or reinforce) levels of confidence about entering the political arena, also a male-dominated environment. Clearly, women and men perceive political reality, their political attributes, and their ability to succeed in the political system through a gendered lens.

### 5. Women react more negatively than men to many aspects of modern campaigns.

Political candidates must engage in a number of different activities and often endure a series of sometimes difficult personal circumstances. We provided respondents with a list of five activities that pertain to the mechanics of a campaign and two examples of the personal toll a campaign might take. The data, presented in Table 7, indicate that women are statistically more likely than men to view four of the five typical campaign activities so negatively that they are deterrents to running for office. More specifically, women exhibit more negative attitudes than men toward fundraising, voter contact, dealing with the press, and engaging in a negative campaign. Turning to the personal aspects of a campaign, women are significantly more likely than men to be deterred from running for office because of the potential loss of privacy and concerns about spending less time with their families.

**Table 7**  
**Attitudes about Engaging in Campaign Activities**

Activities of the Campaign	Women	Men
Soliciting Campaign Contributions	19% *	16%
Dealing with Party Officials	8	6
Going Door-to-Door to Meet Constituents	10 *	7
Dealing with Members of the Press	9 *	6
Potentially Having to Engage in a Negative Campaign	28 *	16
<b>Personal Aspects of the Campaign</b>		
Spending Less Time with Your Family	30 *	21
Loss of Privacy	38 *	29
Sample Size	1,719	1,803

Notes: Entries indicate the percentage of respondents who view each activity so negatively that it serves as a deterrent to running for office. The gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$  for both comparisons.

Overall, 41 percent of men, compared to 52 percent of women, were deterred by at least one typical campaign activity (difference significant at  $p < .05$ ). Women, therefore, have significantly more negative feelings than men toward the various aspects of a campaign that they must reconcile when considering running for office.<sup>10</sup>

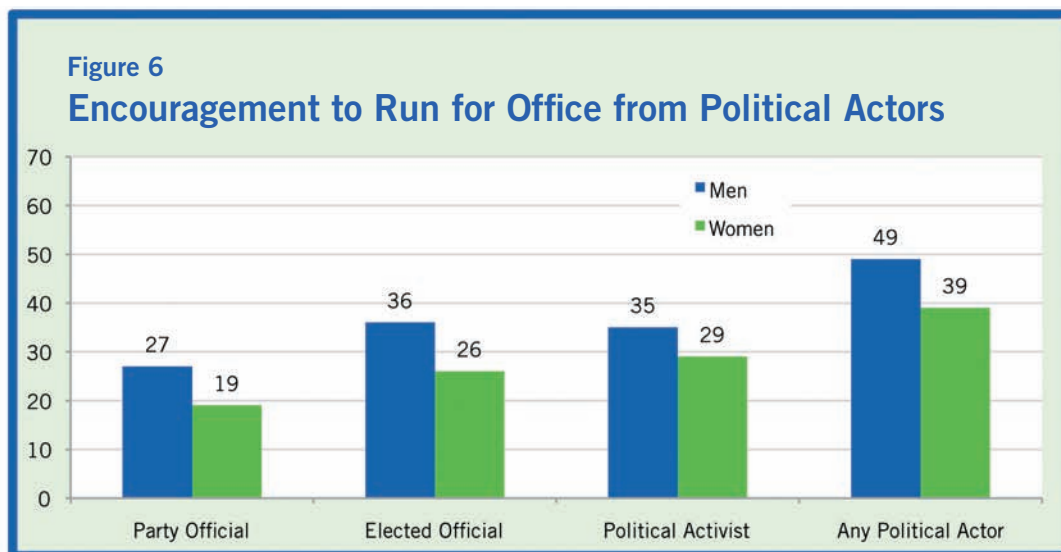
### 6. Women are less likely than men to receive the suggestion to run for office – from anyone.

Recruitment and encouragement lead many individuals who otherwise might never consider running for office to emerge as candidates. Ten years ago, women were far less likely than men to report being

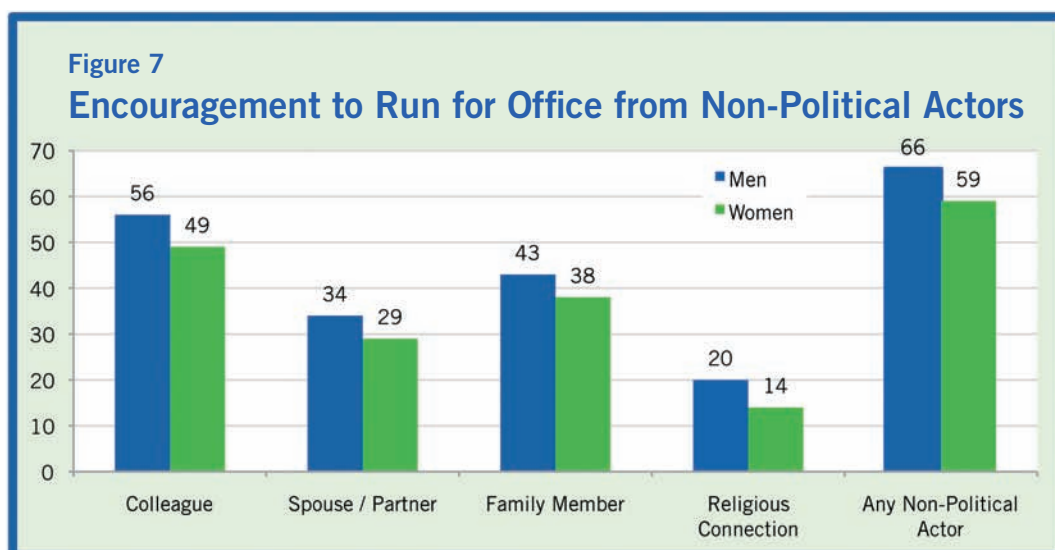


recruited to run for office. Over the course of last decade, however, many women’s organizations burst onto the political scene. They vary in mission and target group, but collectively, these organizations endeavor to move more women into the networks from which candidates emerge.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, 22 percent of the women in our sample report some contact with a women’s organization whose mission is to promote women’s candidacies. Yet the gender gap in political recruitment remains substantial.

To compare women and men’s political recruitment experiences, we asked respondents if anyone ever suggested that they run for office. We broke the possible sources of political recruitment into two categories: “political actors,” which we define as party officials, elected officials, and political activists; and “non-political actors,” defined as colleagues, spouses / partners, family members, and religious connections. The data presented in Figures 6 and 7 reveal that women remain less likely than men to have received the suggestion to run for office, regardless of the source.



Notes: Bars represent the percentage of women and men who were recruited to run for office by each political actor. For all categories, women are statistically less likely than men (at  $p < .05$ ) to report receiving the suggestion to run for office.



Notes: Bars represent the percentage of women and men who were recruited to run for office by each non-political actor. For all categories, women are statistically less likely than men (at  $p < .05$ ) to report receiving the suggestion to run for office.



This gender gap in political recruitment exists at all levels of office. From local, to state, to federal positions, women were significantly less likely than men to report ever receiving the suggestion to run for office (see Table 8).

**Table 8**  
**Gender Differences in Recruitment to Specific Offices**

	Women	Men
<b>Local or Community Office</b>		
School Board	18%	21%
City Council	16	22
Mayor	6	10
District Attorney	1	2
<b>State Level Office</b>		
State Legislator	16	24
Statewide Office (i.e., State Treasurer)	1	2
Governor	1	4
<b>Federal Office</b>		
House of Representatives	4	10
Senate	2	4
Sample Size	1,766	1,848

Notes: Entries indicate the percentage of respondents who report ever receiving the suggestion to run for the office. The gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$  for all comparisons.

It is likely that these gender gaps are far smaller than would be the case if women's organizations did not strive to facilitate women's candidate emergence. But their efforts can do only so much. Party leaders, elected officials, political activists, and non-political actors continue to encourage far more men than women to enter the electoral arena.

The lack of recruitment is a particularly powerful explanation for why women are less likely than men to consider a candidacy. Sixty-seven percent of respondents who have been encouraged to run by a party leader, elected official, or political activist have considered running, compared to 33 percent of respondents who report no such recruitment (difference significant at  $p < .05$ ). The same pattern holds for non-political actors; whereas 78 percent of the potential candidates in our sample who have not received encouragement to run from a colleague, spouse, or family member have not considered a candidacy, 72 percent of respondents who have received such a suggestion have considered throwing their hats into the ring (difference significant at  $p < .05$ ). Importantly, women are just as likely as men to respond favorably to the suggestion of a candidacy. They are just less likely than men to receive it.

## 7. Women are still responsible for the majority of childcare and household tasks.

The results of our 2001 survey revealed that women were much more likely than men to be responsible for the majority of household work and childcare. Despite women's substantial movement into high-level positions in the professional arena, women and men continued to conform to traditional gender roles at home. Our 2011 survey data demonstrate that little has changed over the past ten years.

Table 9 provides a breakdown of the respondents' family arrangements and distribution of household and childcare responsibilities. Women in the sample are significantly less likely than men to be married and have children. This suggests that some women who choose to become top-level professionals are more likely than men to de-emphasize traditional family structures and roles. Those women who are married and who do have children, however, tend to exhibit traditional gender role orientations. In families where both adults are working (generally in high-level careers), women are roughly six times more likely than men to bear responsibility for the majority of household tasks, and they are about ten times more likely to be the primary childcare provider. Notably, these differences in family responsibilities are not merely a matter of gendered perceptions. Both sexes fully recognize this organization of labor. More than 50 percent of men acknowledge that their spouses are responsible for a majority of household tasks and childcare, while only 7 percent of women make the same claim. This division of labor is consistent across political party lines.

Table 9

### Gender Differences in Family Structures, Roles, and Responsibilities

	Women	Men
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	15% *	8%
Married or Living with Partner	72 *	86
Separated or Divorced	13 *	6
<b>Parental Status</b>		
Has Children	73 *	83
Has Children Living at Home	41 *	45
Has Children Under Age 7 Living at Home	15	15
<b>Household Responsibilities</b>		
Responsible for Majority of Household Tasks	43 *	7
Equal Division of Labor	45 *	41
Spouse / Partner Responsible for Majority of Household Tasks	12 *	52
<b>Childcare Responsibilities</b>		
Responsible for Majority of Childcare	60 *	6
Equal Division of Childcare	35 *	40
Spouse / Partner Responsible for Majority of Childcare	6 *	54
Sample Size	1,766	1,848

Notes: Number of cases varies slightly, as some respondents omitted answers to some questions. The household tasks data do not include respondents who are not married or living with a partner; and the childcare arrangements data do not include respondents who do not have children. \* indicates that the gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$ .

We also asked respondents how many hours they spend each day on various activities, including work, childcare, housework, and hobbies. Women and men work the same number of hours (roughly 9 hours per day), but women devote significantly more of their non-working time than men to household tasks and childcare. Whereas women report spending about 2.1 hours per day on household tasks, men report spending about 1.6 hours per day. Among respondents with children, women spend roughly two thirds more time each day than men on childcare (women spend 2.8 hours per day, compared to men, who spend 1.7 hours per day). Men spend more time exercising and pursuing their hobbies and interests (all of these gender differences are significant at  $p < .05$ ). Hence, the data certainly suggest that women's lives are more hectic and confined than those of most of their male counterparts.

The degree to which traditional family dynamics continue to prevail in American culture is, in and of itself, striking. But surprisingly, women's disproportionate familial responsibilities do not dramatically affect whether they have considered running for office or express interest in running for office in the future. Forty-eight percent of women who are responsible for the majority of the household tasks and childcare, for instance, have considered running for office. Forty-five percent of women who shoulder no such burdens have thought about a candidacy. In another example, 43 percent of women with children at home have considered a candidacy, compared to 46 percent of women without children at home. Neither of these small differences approaches conventional levels of statistical significance.

**“Surprisingly, women’s disproportionate familial responsibilities do not dramatically affect whether they have considered running for office or express interest in running for office in the future...The struggle to balance family roles with professional responsibilities has simply become part of the bargain for contemporary women.”**



Our data suggest that the struggle to balance family roles with professional responsibilities has simply become part of the bargain for contemporary women. Of course, even if family structures and arrangements do not preclude women from thinking about a full range of lifetime career options, the circumstances under which such thoughts cross potential candidates' minds might differ for women and men. As one gender politics scholar so aptly characterized political ambition in the contemporary environment, “Women may now think about running for office, but they probably think about it while they are making the bed.”<sup>12</sup> What emerges from this analysis of family roles and structures is the fact that women, though no longer directly impeded from thinking about a candidacy just because they have certain familial responsibilities, face a more complex set of choices than do their male counterparts.

## Where Do We Go From Here? Summary, Discussion, and Concluding Remarks

In analyzing and summarizing this report's key findings, we emphasize several important points:

- In both 2001 and 2011, we uncovered a profound gender gap in interest in seeking elective office. Women of all professions, political parties, ages, and income levels are less likely than their male counterparts to express interest in running for office.

- When we compare the 2011 results to the 2001 data, we see virtually no change in the gender gap in political ambition. Even more startling than the lack of progress in closing the gender gap in interest in seeking office is evidence that the disparity between women and men's ambition for a future candidacy has increased. A smaller ratio of women to men in 2011 than 2001 reported interest in entering the electoral arena at some point down the road.
- The gender gap in political ambition is driven by women's lower levels of political recruitment and lower self-assessments of political qualifications. In addition, women perceive an electoral environment that is biased against them, which likely helps explain their greater aversion to participating in the nuts and bolts of a campaign. Finally, the fact that women remain the primary caretakers of the home and children adds a high degree of complexity to the decision to run office – complexity that most men do not face.

These findings from the Citizen Political Ambition Study cast a cloud over future prospects for gender parity in U.S. political institutions. Women's full inclusion in electoral politics depends on closing the gender gap in political ambition. But our 2011 survey data – which expand our understanding of the factors that play into the decision to run for office – indicate that women remain at a disadvantage on numerous dimensions. The new research presented in this report sheds important light on how women and men experience politics very differently. The offices to which potential candidates are recruited, their perceptions about critical character traits, such as confidence, competitiveness, thick skin, and an entrepreneurial spirit, and their perceptions of the electoral environment and the manner in which women are treated in it, all work to women's detriment. In addition, gender gaps in political recruitment and perceptions of qualifications continue to hinder women's interest in running for office just as much now as a decade ago.

Given the persistent gender gap in political ambition, we are a long way from a political reality in which women and men are equally likely to aspire to attain high-level elective office. The 2012 elections, which are already being heralded as another great year for female candidates, are likely to result in only incremental changes to the number of women serving in the U.S. Congress. The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee has proudly announced that it is running more women in the 2012 cycle than in any previous election. But this record number still means that women – should they win their primary contests – will compete in fewer than one third of the Senate races in 2012.<sup>13</sup> The Republicans are also on track to run a record number of female candidates, although their raw numbers will pale in comparison to the Democrats'. Thus, even if 2012 turns out to be a "banner year" for female candidates, and even if the majority of these women win their races, their victories will amount to, at most, a 1 to 2 percentage point increase in the seats held by women in the U.S. Congress.

The problems that underlie women's numeric under-representation are more fundamental than the occasional attention that political parties pay to women's candidate emergence might suggest. Our findings, in essence, highlight the importance of deepening our understanding of the manner in which women and men in contemporary society are socialized about politics, the acquisition of political power, and the characteristics that qualify individuals to seek it. At a practical level, though, our findings offer some direction for people interested in increasing the number of women serving in office.

- First, the data reveal that although women are less likely than men ever to have considered running for office, they are just as likely as men to respond positively to political recruitment. Recruiting early and recruiting often are vital ingredients for closing the gender gap in political ambition. In fact, recruitment might be the only quick fix for party leaders, elected officials, and political activists to pursue.
- Second, a substantial barrier to entering politics for many female potential candidates is the perception of a biased and competitive electoral atmosphere. Yet many of these

perceptions are not consistent with the reality that women are just as likely as men to succeed in the electoral arena. Spreading the word about women's electoral success and fundraising prowess can work to change potential candidates' perceptions of a biased electoral arena – perceptions that may be driven by exposure to a handful of very high-profile, but unrepresentative, candidates and campaigns.

- Third, because women view the activities involved in running for office much more negatively than do men, political and women's organizations would be well-served to work with female candidates to determine the best ways to minimize the personal trade-offs involved in seeking office. Training programs and technical assistance cannot be underestimated in closing the ambition gap. These resources can also go a long way in combating women's tendency to identify themselves as unqualified to run for office, despite equal or superior resumes and accomplishments when compared to men who opt to run.
- Fourth, the gendered division of labor we uncovered demonstrates that women and men who are similarly situated professionally are not similarly situated at home. Any move toward a more family-friendly work environment and campaign arena would likely confer disproportional benefits to women. Organizations and individuals dedicated to closing the gender gap in political ambition, therefore, must be cognizant of the persistence of traditional family dynamics.
- Finally, gender differences in interest in running for office are well in place by the time women and men begin their professional careers. The 2011 survey reveals that the gender gap in potential candidates' political ambition is just as glaring among 24 – 35 year olds as it is among older age cohorts. Gender differences in confidence, competitiveness, and ambition develop long before adulthood. A complete understanding of the interaction between gender and political ambition, therefore, demands that we focus on the origins of the gender gap. Conducting a national survey of high school and college students' attitudes toward seeking and holding elective office would go a long way in assessing the role of various socializing agents at critical moments in the development of early political identity. Only then can parents, educators, and civic organizations develop meaningful interventions that will mitigate the gender gap in political ambition.

Concerns about democratic legitimacy and political accountability necessitate that we continue to examine and work to ameliorate gender disparities in office holding. The large gender gap in political ambition we identify, coupled with the stagnation in the number of women serving in elected offices in the last decade, makes the road ahead look quite daunting. Indeed, many barriers to women's interest in running for office can be overcome only with major cultural and political changes. But in the meantime, our results suggest that recruiting female candidates and disseminating information about the electoral environment and women's successes can help narrow the gender gap and increase women's numeric representation. The challenges in front of us are to continue to raise awareness about the barriers women face, and to continue to advocate for a more inclusive electoral process.

## Appendix A: Research on the Difference Women Make in Politics

Despite their low numbers, female elected officials make a difference in the issues they prioritize, the bills they sponsor and cosponsor, the output they generate, and the extent to which they mobilize their constituents. While by no means an exhaustive list, the following academic books and articles – noted along with the central finding from each – serve as an excellent starting point for individuals interested in gaining a more thorough grasp of the experiences and impact of women in U.S. politics.

### For more on women elected officials' preferences and performance, see:

- Anzia, Sarah and Christopher Berry. 2011. “The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?” *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3):478-93.
  - Female members of Congress secure more dollars from federal discretionary programs than do their male counterparts.
- Poggione, Sarah. 2004. “Exploring Gender Differences in State Legislators’ Policy Preferences.” *Political Research Quarterly* 57:305-14.
  - Women state legislators hold more liberal preferences on welfare policy than men, even when controlling for constituency preferences and party ideology.
- Tolbert, Caroline J. and Gertrude A. Steuernagel. 2001. “Women Lawmakers, State Mandates and Women’s Health.” *Women & Politics* 22(1):1-39.
  - Although both men and women are likely to vote in favor of bills dealing with women’s health policy, the number of women in leadership positions correlates with the adoption of specific women’s health policies, such as reconstructive breast surgery and extended maternity stays.
- Norton, Noelle. 1999. “Uncovering the Dimensionality of Gender Voting in Congress.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 24(1):65-86.
  - Female legislators are more likely than men to vote for reproductive rights and role-change legislation.
- Swers, Michele L. 1998. “Are Congresswomen More Likely to Vote for Women’s Issue Bills than Their Male Colleagues?” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 23:435-48.
  - In the 103rd Congress, the sex of the representative was most significant on votes addressing abortion and women’s health.
- Kathlene, Lyn. 1995. “Alternative Views of Crime: Legislative Policymaking in Gendered Terms.” *Journal of Politics* 57(3):696-723.
  - Because they are more concerned with context and environmental factors when deliberating on crime and punishment, women state assembly members are more likely than men to advocate for rehabilitation programs and less likely than men to support punitive policies.
- Thomas, Sue. 1992. “The Effects of Race and Gender on Constituency Service.” *Western Political Quarterly* 45:161-80.
  - Female city council members spend more time doing constituency service than their male counterparts.

**For evidence of the manner in which female elected officials affect constituents' political behavior, interest, and efficacy, see:**

- Reingold, Beth and Jessica Harrell. 2010. "The Impact of Descriptive Representation on Women's Political Engagement: Does Party Matter?" *Political Research Quarterly* 63(2):280-94.
  - The symbolic impact of women represented by women in political office is limited primarily to women who share the same party identification.
- Atkeson, Lonna Rae and Nancy Carillo. 2007. "More is Better: The Influence of Collective Female Descriptive Representation on External Efficacy." *Politics & Gender* 3(1):79-101.
  - Greater proportions of women in state houses across the country increase women's confidence in government relative to men's.
- Campbell, David E. and Christina Wolbrecht. 2006. "See Jane Run: Women Politicians as Role Models for Adolescents." *Journal of Politics* 68(2):233-47.
  - There is a positive relationship between the presence of highly visible female politicians and adolescent girls' expectations of political engagement.
- Lawless, Jennifer L. 2004. "Politics of Presence? Congresswomen and Symbolic Representation." *Political Research Quarterly* 57(1):81-99.
  - Women represented by women offer more positive evaluations of their members of Congress (although this difference does not translate into increased participation in the political arena).
- Atkeson, Lonna Rae. 2003. "Not All Cues are Created Equal: The Conditional Impact of Female Candidates on Political Engagement." *Journal of Politics* 65:1040-61.
  - Women who live in states with visible and competitive female candidates have higher levels of political engagement among women.
- Hansen, Susan B. 1997. "Talking About Politics: Gender and Contextual Effects on Political Proselytizing." *Journal of Politics* 59(1):73-103.
  - During 1992's "Year of the Woman," the presence of female candidates on the ballot was associated with higher levels of political involvement, internal political efficacy, and media use by men and women in the electorate.

**For evidence of gender differences in elected officials' agendas, see:**

- Gershon, Sarah. 2008. "Communicating Female and Minority Interests Online: A Study of Web Site Issue Discussion among Female, Latino, and African American Members of Congress." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(2):120-40.
  - Female, Latino, and African American members of the U.S. House of Representatives more frequently link the importance of issues to gender and race on their websites.
- Gerrity, Jessica, Tracy Osborn, and Jeanette Morehouse Mendez. 2007. "Women and Representation: A Different View of the District?" *Politics & Gender* 3:179-200.
  - A woman who replaces a man in the same U.S. House district sponsors relatively more legislation that pertains to women's issues.
- Bratton, Kathleen A. 2005. "Critical Mass Theory Revisited: The Behavior and Success of Token Women in State Legislatures." *Politics & Gender* 1(1):97-125.
  - Even in legislatures with a small number of women, those women are generally more active in sponsoring legislation with a focus on women's interests.



- Swers, Michele L. 2002. *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
  - Democratic and moderate Republican congresswomen are more likely to pursue women's interests, such as childcare and domestic violence.
- Shogan, Colleen J. 2001. "Speaking Out: An Analysis of Democratic and Republican Woman-Invoked Rhetoric of the 105th Congress." *Women & Politics* 23(1/2):129-46.
  - Democratic and Republican women are more likely than men to bring up women or women's issues in their floor speeches in the U.S. House; and women spend more time than men speaking about other women's health issues.
- Reingold, Beth. 2000. *Representing Women: Sex, Gender and Legislative Behavior in Arizona and California*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
  - Female state legislators in Arizona and California are more likely than men to sponsor bills addressing women's issues.
- Wolbrecht, Christina. 2000. *The Politics of Women's Rights: Parties, Positions and Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
  - Women in the U.S. House sponsor a greater number of bills that pertain to women's rights.
- Dodson, Debra. 1998. "Representing Women's Interests in the U.S. House of Representatives." In Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  - Electing more women would substantially reduce the possibility that politicians will overlook gender-salient issues.
- Burrell, Barbara. 1996. *A Woman's Place is in the House: Campaigning for Congress in the Feminist Era*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
  - Women are more supportive of "women's issues" than are male members of Congress.
- Thomas, Sue. 1991. "The Impact of Women on State Legislative Policies." *Journal of Politics* 53:958-76.
  - Women serving in states with higher percentages of female state legislators introduce a greater number of bills concerning issues pertaining to women, children, and families than women in states with fewer female representatives.
- Thomas, Sue and Susan Welch. 1991. "The Impact of Gender on Activities and Priorities of State Legislators." *Western Political Quarterly* 44:445-56.
  - Female state legislators are more likely than men to say that bills relating to children, families, or women's issues are at the top of their legislative priorities.

**For examples of gender differences in the ways elected and appointed officials govern, see:**

- Fox, Richard L. and Robert A. Schuhmann. 1999. "Gender and Local Government: A Comparison of Women and Men City Managers." *Public Administration Review* 59(3):231-42.
  - Female city managers are more likely than their male counterparts to incorporate citizen input into their decisions and to be more concerned with community involvement.



- Kathlene, Lyn. 1994. "Power and Influence in State Legislative Policy-Making: The Interaction of Gender and Position in Committee Hearing Debates." *American Political Science Review* 88(3):560-76.
  - Male and female state legislature committee chairs conduct themselves differently at hearings; women are more likely to act as facilitators, but men tend to use their power to control the direction of the hearings.
  
- Tolleson Rinehart, Sue. 1991. "Do Women Leaders Make a Difference? Substance, Style and Perceptions." In Debra Dodson, ed., *Gender and Policy Making*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for American Women and Politics.
  - Female mayors are more likely to adopt an approach to governing that emphasizes congeniality and cooperation, whereas men tend to emphasize hierarchy.

## Appendix B: Sample Design and Data Collection

We drew a national sample of 9,000 individuals from the professions and backgrounds that tend to yield the highest proportion of congressional and state legislative candidates: law, business, education, and political activism. In assembling the sample, we created two equal sized pools of candidates – one female and one male – that held the same professional credentials.

Turning specifically to the four sub-samples, for lawyers and business leaders, we drew names from national directories. We obtained a random sample of 2,000 lawyers from the 2009 edition of the *Martindale-Hubble Law Directory*, which provides the names of practicing attorneys in all law firms across the country. We stratified the total number of lawyers by sex and in proportion to the total number of law firms listed for each state. We randomly selected 3,000 business leaders from *Dun and Bradstreet's Million Dollar Directory, 2009 – 2010*, which lists the top executive officers of more than 160,000 U.S. public and private companies. Again, we stratified by geography and sex and ensured that men and women held comparable positions.<sup>14</sup>

No national directories exist for our final two categories. To compile a sample of educators, we focused on college professors and administrative officials, and public school teachers and administrators. We compiled a random sample of 800 public and private colleges and universities from the University of Texas's list of roughly 2,000 institutions that grant at least a four-year bachelor's degree.<sup>15</sup> We selected 400 male and 400 female professors and administrative officials. Because we did not stratify by school size, the college and university portion of the sample yielded a higher number of educators from smaller schools; however, we found that the size of the institution was not a significant predictor of political ambition. We then compiled a national sample of 600 male and 600 female public school teachers and principals. We obtained a list of all public schools throughout the country from the Department of Education's website, and then randomly selected the schools. We chose a specific teacher or principal at random from the school's webpage. A 2001 study by the U.S. Department of Education found that 98 percent of public schools had internet access and 84 percent had a webpage. While this study has not been updated, it is likely that closer to 100 percent of public schools now have a webpage.

Our final eligibility pool profession – “political activists and professionals” – represents citizens who work in politics and public policy. We included in this sub-sample three types of potential candidates. First, we created a list of political interest groups and national organizations with state and/or local affiliates and sought to strike a partisan and ideological balance. We randomly selected state branch and local chapter executive directors and officers of organizations that focus on the environment, abortion, consumer issues, race relations, civil liberties, taxes, guns, crime, social security, school choice, government reform, and “women's issues.” This selection technique, which provided a range of activists from a broad cross-section of occupations, yielded 600 men and 600 women. Second, we compiled a random sample of 200 congressional chiefs of staff and legislative directors (100 women and 100 men), all of whom work in the representative or senator's Washington, DC, office. Third, we created a random sample of 300 female and 300 male local party leaders. We followed links from the national Democratic and Republican parties' websites to local chapters and offices, from where we selected six Democrats and six Republicans from each state.

We employed standard mail survey protocol in conducting the study. Potential candidates received an initial letter explaining the study and a copy of the questionnaire. Three days later, they received a follow-up postcard. Two weeks later, we sent a follow-up letter with another copy of the questionnaire. We supplemented this third piece of correspondence with an email message when possible. Four months later, we sent another copy of the questionnaire. The final contact was made the following

month, when we sent a link to an on-line version of the survey. Survey responses from nearly 3,800 members of the “candidate eligibility pool” serve as the basis for this report.<sup>16</sup>

Our sample of the “eligibility pool,” therefore, is a broad cross-section of equally credentialed and professionally similar women and men who are positioned to serve as future candidates for elective office. Table 10 reveals that the samples are roughly equal in terms of race, education, household income, and profession.

**Table 10**  
**The Citizen Political Ambition Study**  
**Sample Demographics (2011)**

	Women	Men
<b>Party Affiliation</b>		
Democrat	49% **	37%
Independent	28 **	34
Republican	24 **	29
<b>Race</b>		
White	81	84
Black	7	6
Latino / Hispanic	7	7
Other	5	4
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>		
No College Degree	10	7
Bachelor’s Degree	22	23
Graduate Degree	68	70
<b>Household Income</b>		
Less than \$50,000	6	5
\$50,001 - \$75,000	11	9
\$75,001 - \$100,000	14	16
\$100,001 - \$200,000	36	34
More than \$200,000	33	36
<b>Profession</b>		
Law	26	26
Business	17	20
Education	28	28
Politics	29	26
<b>Mean Age (Years)</b>	<b>50 *</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>1,766</b>	<b>1,848</b>

Notes: Number of cases varies slightly, as some respondents omitted answers to some questions. Independents include partisan leaners, 13 percent of whom lean Democratic and 10 percent of whom lean Republican. \* indicates that the gender gap is significant at  $p < .05$ .

Moreover, the women and men who completed the survey are well-matched in political engagement. We asked respondents whether – in the past two years – they had engaged in ten different types of political participation, such as voting, contributing money to a candidate, or serving on the board of an organization. The mean number of acts of political participation (out of 10) for women was 5.6; the mean number of acts for men was 5.7. Women and men are also comparable in their interest in local and national politics, as well as their personal exposure and closeness to elected officials.

Table 10 does, however, reveal two statistically significant differences between women and men that merit discussion. Women in the sample, on average, are three years younger than men, a probable result of the fact that women’s entry into the fields of law and business is a relatively recent phenomenon. Further, women are more likely to be Democrats and liberal-leaning, while men are more likely to be Republicans and conservative, a finding consistent with recent polls showing a partisan gender gap among the general U.S. population.

Overall, our “eligibility pool approach” and sample allow us to offer a nuanced examination of the manner in which potential candidates make the initial decision to run for all levels and types of political office, both now and in the future.

## Notes

- 1 Based on her analysis of a series of public opinion polls and election results, Kathleen Dolan (2004, 50) concludes, “Levels of bias are low enough to no longer provide significant impediments to women’s chances of election” (*Voting for Women: How the Public Evaluates Women Candidates*. Boulder: Westview Press). For other examples of scholarly research that arrives at the conclusion that women fare as well as their male counterparts on Election Day, see e.g., Fox, Richard L. 2010. “Congressional Elections: Women’s Candidacies and the Road to Gender Parity.” In *Gender and Elections*, 2nd edition, eds. S. Carroll and R. Fox. New York: Cambridge University Press; Lawless, Jennifer L. and Kathryn Pearson. 2008. “The Primary Reason for Women’s Under-Representation: Re-Evaluating the Conventional Wisdom.” *Journal of Politics* 70(1):67-82; Smith, Eric R.A.N. and Richard L. Fox. 2001. “A Research Note: The Electoral Fortunes of Women Candidates for Congress.” *Political Research Quarterly* 54(1):205-21; Cook, Elizabeth Adell. 1998. “Voter Reaction to Women Candidates.” In *Women and Elective Office*, eds. S. Thomas and C. Wilcox. New York: Oxford University Press; Seltzer, R.A., J. Newman and M. Voorhees Leighton. 1997. *Sex as a Political Variable*. Boulder: Lynne Reinner.
- 2 We acknowledge the conventional wisdom explaining women’s slow ascension into electoral politics. Structural barriers, most notably the incumbency advantage and the proportion of women in the “pipeline” professions that precede political careers, limit the number of electoral opportunities for women and other previously excluded groups. There is no question that, as more open seats emerge, and as women continue to increase their proportions in the fields that tend to lead to office holding, there will be an increase in the number of female candidates. But by demonstrating that the process by which qualified individuals become actual candidates differs for women and men, we challenge the very precarious assumption that equally credentialed women and men are equally likely to emerge from the candidate eligibility pool, run for office, and win their races.
- 3 This was an endeavor to which virtually no research had been devoted. When we embarked upon this project and conducted the first wave of our study, there were two exceptions: The National Women’s Political Caucus’s poll of potential candidates (National Women’s Political Caucus. 1994. *Why Don’t More Women Run? A study prepared by Mellman, Lazarus, and Lake*, Washington, DC: National Women’s Political Caucus); and a mail survey of potential candidates in New York state, which served as a pilot for our national study (Fox, Richard L., Jennifer L. Lawless and Courtney Feeley. 2001. “Gender and the Decision to Run for Office.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26(3):411-35).
- 4 The results of the first wave of the study were widely disseminated. In addition to a series of academic journal articles and two policy reports, the results served as the basis of a book: Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox. 2005. *It Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press. In 2008, we resurveyed and interviewed the same respondents from 2001, only to find that, among the 2,036 women and men who completed the 2008 questionnaire, aggregate levels of interest in running for office remained the same. The 2008 follow-up study yielded two books: Jennifer L. Lawless. 2012. *Becoming a Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press; and Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- 5 Women are not only less likely than men to consider running for office; they are also less likely actually to do it. Overall, 12 percent of the respondents had run for some elective position. Men, however, were 40 percent more likely than women to have done so (9 percent of women, compared to 14 percent of men; difference significant at  $p < .05$ ). Although there was no statistically significant gender difference in election outcomes, women were less likely than men to reach this seemingly gender neutral “end-stage” of the electoral process.
- 6 All of the comparisons we present here and throughout the remainder of the report are based on the overall sample of potential candidates. When we break the data down into professional sub-samples (i.e., lawyers, business leaders, educators, political activists), in almost all cases, the magnitude of the gender gaps and levels of statistical significance remain unchanged.
- 7 “Transcript: Hillary Clinton Endorses Barack Obama,” *New York Times*, June 7, 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/07/us/politics/07text-clinton.html?r=1&pagewanted=all> (November 23, 2011).
- 8 “Transcript: Palin’s Speech in Dayton, Ohio,” *National Public Radio*, August 29, 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94118910> (November 23, 2011).
- 9 Certainly, party identification influences assessments of gender bias faced by Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin. For instance, 74 percent of Democrats, compared to only 49 percent of Republicans and independents, believe Hillary Clinton received sexist media coverage and treatment (difference significant at  $p < .05$ ). On the other end of the spectrum, whereas 76 percent of Republicans identified sexist media treatment directed at Sarah Palin, 64 percent of Democrats did so (difference significant at  $p < .05$ ). Across the board, though, women of both political parties were more likely than men to identify media and voter bias against these female candidates, and sizeable portions of women crossed party lines to express perceptions of sexism.
- 10 In 2001, we did not uncover these gender differences in attitudes toward campaigning. We reported no gender differences in attitudes about attending fundraisers or dealing with party officials. The three significant differences we did find regarding attitudes toward campaigning revealed that women were actually more positive than men about dealing with the press, meeting constituents, and enduring the time consuming nature of a campaign. The different results likely reflect question wording differences, as opposed to changes in attitudes. Asking whether a respondent feels “positively” about a campaign activity, which is how we asked the question in 2001, seems to have obscured the intensity behind attitudes. Women in the candidate eligibility pool remain just as likely as men to state that the rigors of a campaign would not bother them – i.e., that they feel positively about engaging in them. But our new, more detailed investigation reveals that the women who do not embrace campaign activities hold much more intense negative views than do their male counterparts.
- 11 The White House Project, for example, is a national, non-partisan organization that, since 1998, has advanced women’s leadership and attempted to fill the candidate pipeline. In 2007, the Women’s Campaign Forum launched its “She Should Run” campaign, a non-partisan, online effort to build the pipeline of Democratic and Republican pro-choice women and inject them into the networks that can promote eventual candidacies. Emerge America, founded in 2002, trains Democratic women across the country to develop networks of supporters so that they can successfully run for and win elective office. The

EMILY's List Political Opportunity Program, which began in 2001, trains and supports pro-choice Democratic women to run for all levels of office. Many statewide and local women's organizations have also recently launched aggressive campaigns to bring more women into political circles and positions of power.

12 We thank Georgia Duerst-Lahti for this comment.

13 Josh Kraushaar, "Democrats Bet the Senate on Women," *National Journal Daily*, November 30, 2011. Accessed at: <http://nationaljournal.com/columns/against-the-grain/democrats-bet-the-senate-on-women-20111129?print=true> (December 6, 2011).

14 We sampled 1,000 more business leaders than members of the other three professions because we expected a disproportionate amount of undeliverable mail for the business sub-sample. Not only do members of the business community change positions and companies more frequently than do attorneys or educators, but the directory from which we compiled the sample also lists only the addresses of the corporate headquarters; in many cases, this was not the address at which our intended respondent worked.

15 See <http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state/> (March 20, 2011).

16 From the original sample of 9,000, 1,661 surveys were undeliverable. From the remaining members of the sample, we received 3,953 responses. After taking into account respondents who left the majority of the questionnaire incomplete, we were left with 3,768 completed surveys, for a usable response rate of 51 percent. Response rates within the four sub-samples were: lawyers – 54%; business leaders – 38%; educators – 56%; political activists – 58%, and did not differ by sex.

## About the Authors



**Jennifer L. Lawless** is Associate Professor of Government at American University, where she is also the Director of the Women & Politics Institute. Her research focuses on representation, political ambition, and gender in the electoral process. She is the author of *Becoming a Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office* (2012, Cambridge University Press) and the co-author of *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office* (2010, Cambridge University Press). Her work has appeared in academic journals including the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Journal of Politics*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, and *Politics & Gender*. She is a nationally recognized speaker on women and electoral politics, and her scholarly analysis and political commentary have been quoted in numerous newspapers, magazines, television news programs, and radio shows. In 2006, she sought the Democratic nomination for the U.S. House of Representatives in Rhode Island's second congressional district.

Jennifer Lawless can be reached at [lawless@american.edu](mailto:lawless@american.edu).



**Richard L. Fox** is Associate Professor of Political Science at Loyola Marymount University. His research examines how gender affects voting behavior, state executive elections, congressional elections, and political ambition. He is the author of *Gender Dynamics in Congressional Elections* (1997, Sage) and co-author of *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office* (2010, Cambridge University Press) and *Tabloid Justice: The Criminal Justice System in the Age of Media Frenzy* (2001, Lynne Rienner). He is also co-editor of *Gender and Elections* (2010, Cambridge University Press) and *iPolitics: Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era* (2012, Cambridge University Press). His work has appeared in academic journals including *Political Psychology*, *Journal of Politics*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Social Problems*, *PS*, and *Politics & Gender*. His op-ed articles have appeared in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Richard Fox can be reached at [richard.fox@lmu.edu](mailto:richard.fox@lmu.edu).

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