

# Girls Just Wanna Not Run

The Gender Gap in Young Americans'  
Political Ambition



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## Executive Summary

Studies of women and men who are well-situated to run for office uncover a persistent gender gap in political ambition. Among “potential candidates” – lawyers, business leaders, educators, and political activists – women are less likely than men to express interest in a political career. Given the emergence over the past ten years of high-profile women in politics, such as Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, Sarah Palin, and Michele Bachmann, though, the landscape of U.S. politics looks to be changing. Perhaps young women are now just as motivated as young men to enter the electoral arena. Maybe young women envision future candidacies at similar rates as their male counterparts. Until now, no research has provided an analysis – let alone an in-depth investigation – of these topics.

This report fills that void. Based on the results of a new survey of more than 2,100 college students between the ages of 18 and 25, we offer the first assessment of political ambition early in life. And our results are troubling. Young women are less likely than young men ever to have considered running for office, to express interest in a candidacy at some point in the future, or to consider elective office a desirable profession. Moreover, the size of the gender gap in political ambition we uncover among 18 – 25 year olds is comparable to the size of the gap we previously uncovered in studies of potential candidates already working in the feeder professions to politics. Our data suggest, therefore, that the gender gap in ambition is already well in place by the time women and men enter their first careers.

Why? We identify five factors that contribute to the gender gap in political ambition among college students:

- 1. Young men are more likely than young women to be socialized by their parents to think about politics as a career path.**
- 2. From their school experiences to their peer associations to their media habits, young women tend to be exposed to less political information and discussion than do young men.**
- 3. Young men are more likely than young women to have played organized sports and care about winning.**
- 4. Young women are less likely than young men to receive encouragement to run for office – from anyone.**
- 5. Young women are less likely than young men to think they will be qualified to run for office, even once they are established in their careers.**

Given this persistent gender gap in political ambition, we are a long way from a political reality in which young women and men are equally likely to aspire to seek and hold elective office in the future. Certainly, recruitment efforts by women’s organizations – nationally and on college campuses – can chip away at the gender imbalance in interest in running for office. Encouraging parents, family members, teachers, and coaches to urge young women to think about a political career can mitigate the gender gap in ambition, too. And spurring young women to immerse themselves in competitive environments, such as organized sports, can go a long way in reinforcing the competitive spirit associated with interest in a future candidacy. But women’s under-representation in elective office is likely to extend well into the future. In short, this report documents how far from gender parity we remain and the deeply embedded nature of the obstacles we must still overcome to achieve it.

# Girls Just Wanna Not Run: The Gender Gap in Young Americans' Political Ambition

Why do so few women hold positions of political power in the United States? For the last few decades, researchers have provided compelling evidence that when women run for office – regardless of the position they seek – they are just as likely as men to win their races.<sup>1</sup> The large gender disparities in U.S. political institutions (see Table 1), therefore, do not result from systematic discrimination against female candidates.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the fundamental reason for women's under-representation is that women do not run for office. There is a substantial and persistent gender gap in political ambition; men tend to have it, and women don't.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1**  
**Female Office Holders in the United States, 2013**

Office	Percent Women
U.S. Senators	20.0
Members of the U.S. House of Representatives	17.8
State Governors	10.0
Statewide Elected Officials	22.4
State Legislators	23.7
Mayors of the 100 Largest Cities	12.0

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

But if we glance at the television screen, peruse the newspaper, listen to the radio, or scan the Internet, it looks like women have made remarkable political gains. Nancy Pelosi currently serves as the Minority Leader in the U.S. House of Representatives. In 2011, polls consistently placed former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin in the top tier of potential candidates for the

Republican presidential nomination. Michele Bachmann garnered serious and sustained attention as a candidate for the GOP nomination for president in 2012. And former Secretary of State (and former U.S. Senator) Hillary Clinton not only received 18 million votes when she sought the Democratic nomination for president in 2008, but also achieved the highest favorability ratings of any member of the Obama Administration. Indeed, Clinton is considered the frontrunner should she seek the Democratic nomination for president in 2016.

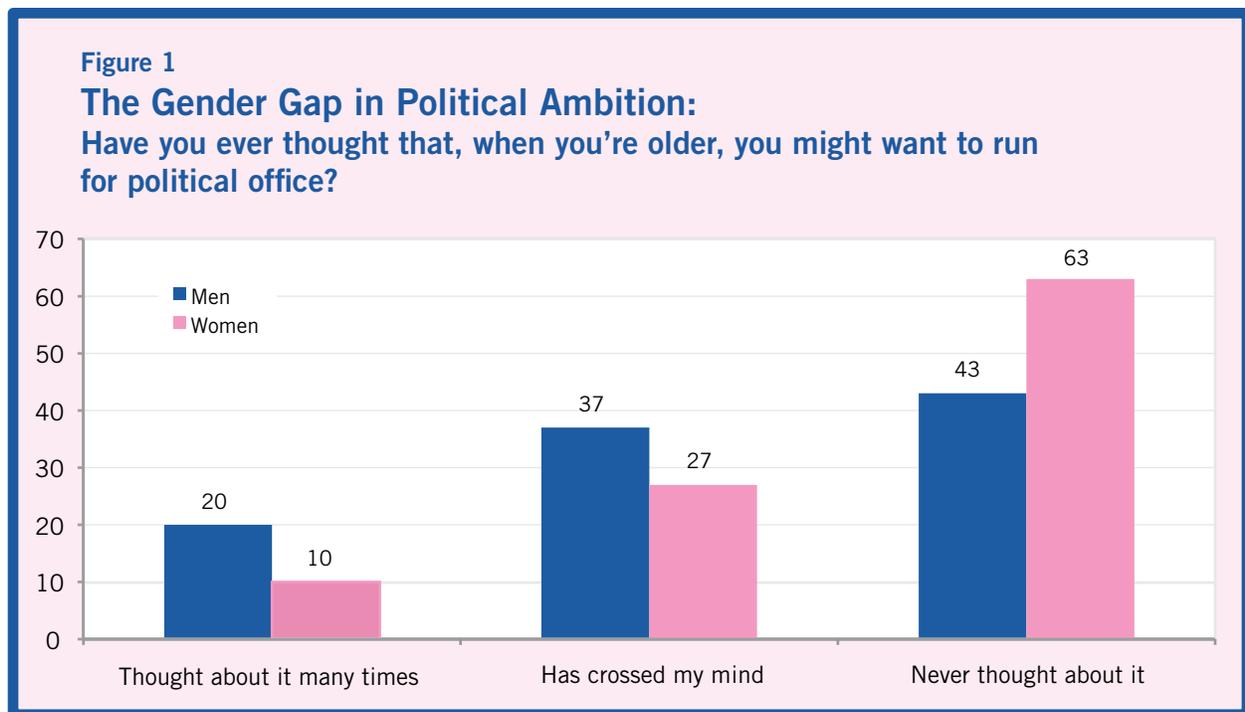
These high-profile faces suggest that the landscape of U.S. politics has changed and that male dominance has waned. We might be tempted to conclude that women today are just as likely as men to aspire to run for office and that, in the future, women will be eager to seize the reins of political power. Clearly, whether the United States will move toward gender parity in political leadership depends heavily on the extent to which young women envision themselves as candidates and are open to the idea of entering the electoral arena. Yet, until now, no research has provided an analysis – let alone an in-depth investigation – of these topics.

This report offers the first assessment of political ambition among the next generation of potential candidates. Our findings are based on the results of a survey we conducted through GfK Custom Research LLC (formerly *Knowledge Networks*) from September 27 – October 16, 2012. We surveyed a national random sample of 1,020 male and 1,097 female college students (ages 18 – 25), which makes for an ideal snapshot of future candidates because the vast majority of office-holders, especially at the federal level, hold a college degree.

The results are troubling. The women and men we surveyed are generally comparable in terms of age, race, region, religion, household income, and party affiliation (see Appendix A). But we identify a substantial gender gap in political ambition – a gap just as large as the one we previously uncovered among adult professionals who were well-situated to pursue a candidacy. In exploring the contours of the gap, this report documents how far from gender parity we remain and the deeply embedded nature of the barriers and obstacles the next generation must still overcome to achieve it.

## Over Time and across Generations: The Persistent Gender Gap in Political Ambition

Put simply, our research reveals that young women and men are not equally politically ambitious. When we asked our sample of more than 2,100 college students whether they ever thought that, someday, when they were older, they might want to run for political office, nearly half the respondents (47 percent) stated that the idea of running for an elective position had at least “crossed their mind.” The data presented in Figure 1, however, highlight a significant gender gap: men were twice as likely as women to have thought about running for office “many times,” whereas women were 20 percentage points more likely than men never to have considered it.

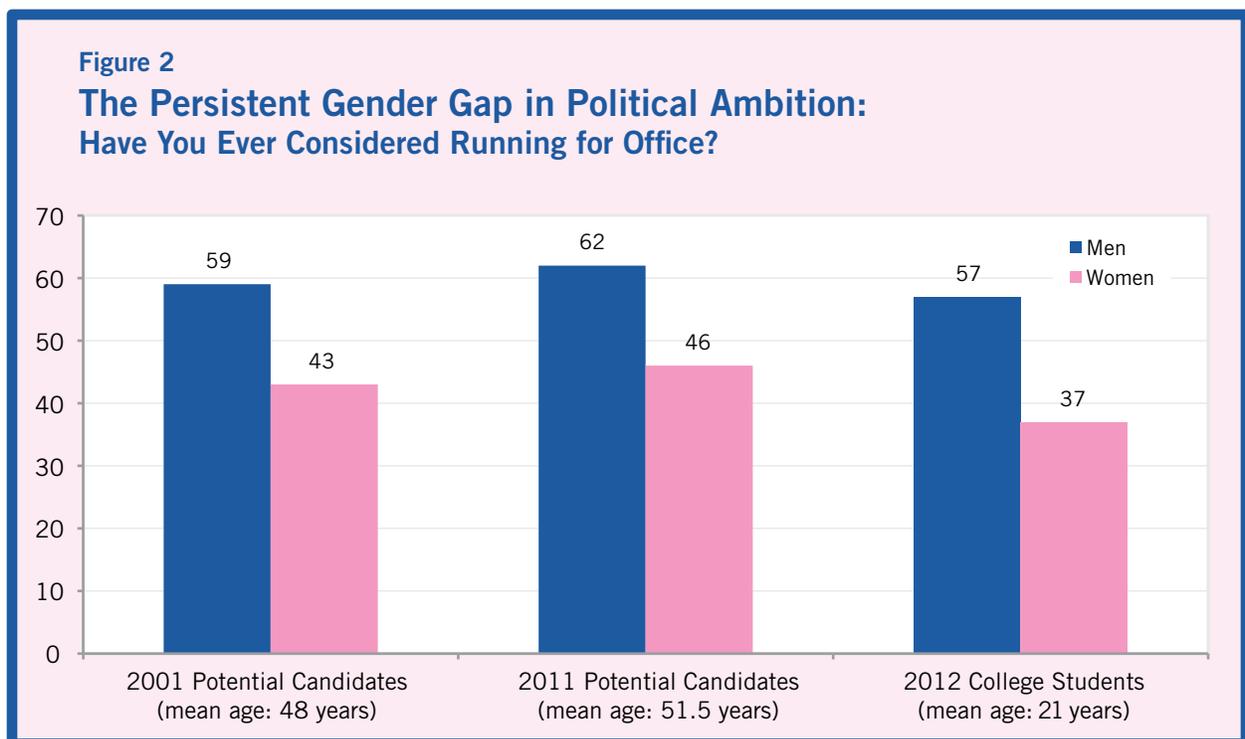


Notes: Data are based on responses from 1,020 men and 1,097 women. Bars represent the percentage of men and women who fall into each category. The gender gap in each comparison is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

When we turn to the question of college students’ future plans to run for office, the prospects for women’s full inclusion in electoral politics are just as bleak. Men were twice as likely as women to report that they “definitely” plan to run for office at some point in the future (14 percent of men, compared to 7 percent of women). Women, on the other hand, were more than 50 percent more likely than men to assert that they would never run (36 percent of women, compared to 23 percent of men, articulated “absolutely no interest” in a future candidacy).

To put these gender gaps in perspective, we can compare them to those we previously uncovered among adults in the “candidate eligibility pool.” In 2001 and 2011, we surveyed thousands of male and female “potential candidates” – lawyers, business leaders, educators, and political activists, all of whom were well-situated to pursue a political candidacy. We found that women were less likely than men ever to have considered running for office; and even when they had considered a candidacy, women were less likely than men actually to seek an elected position.<sup>4</sup>

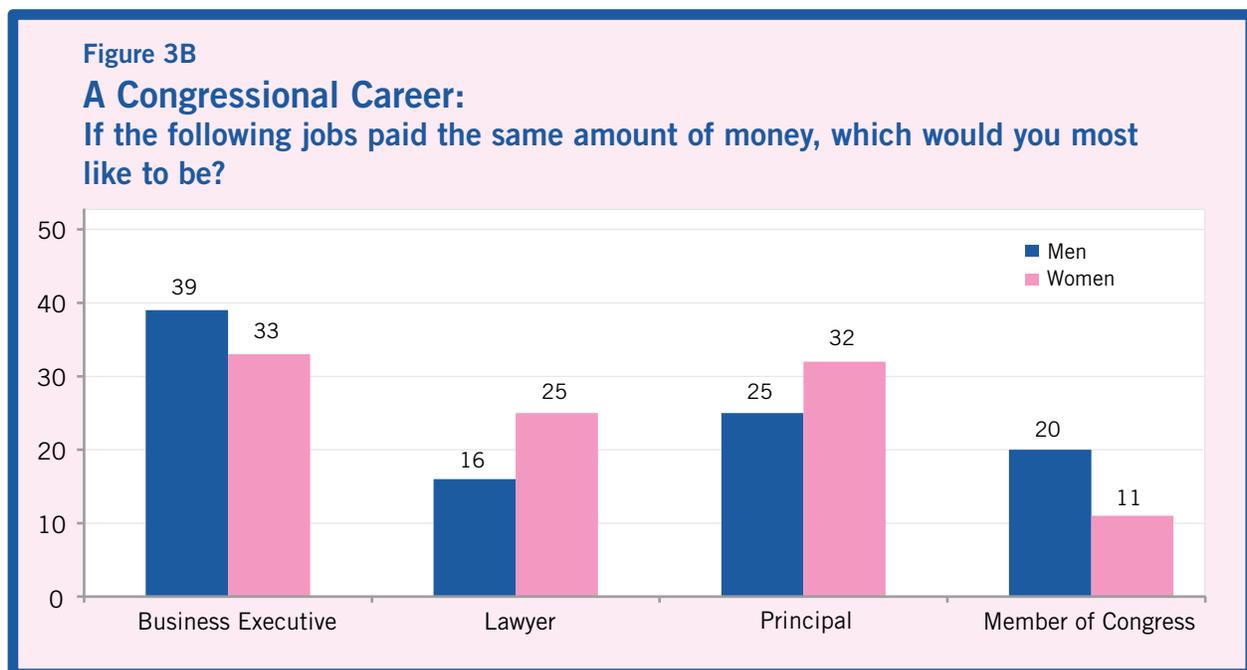
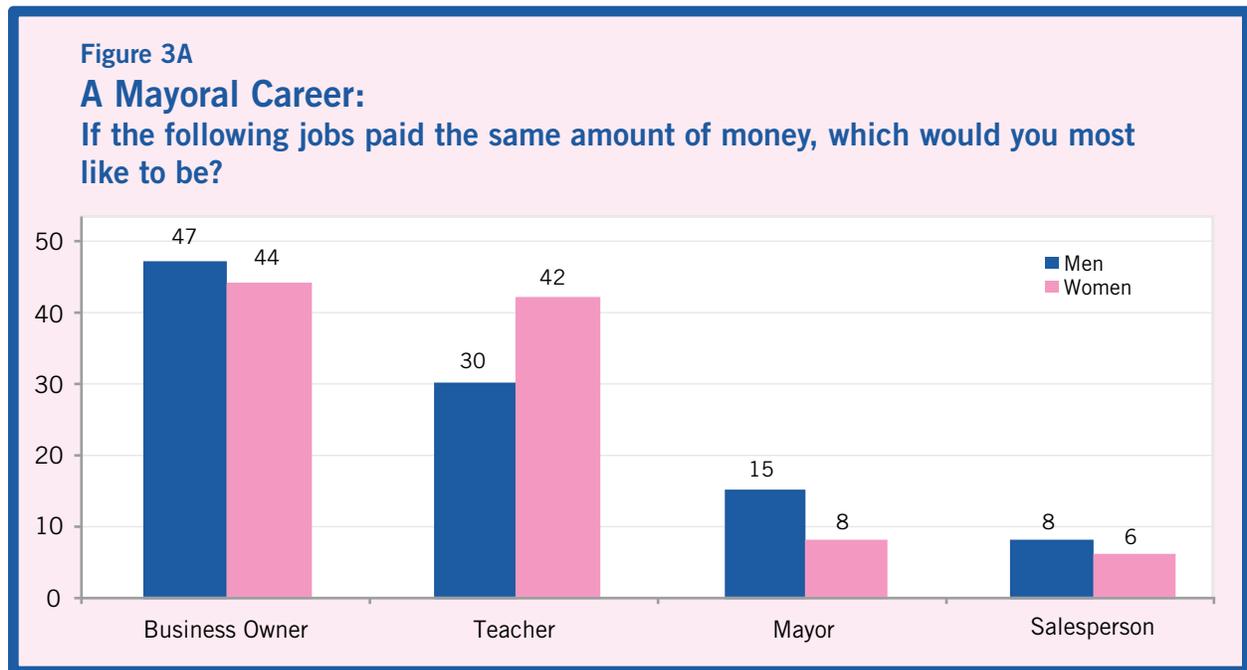
Figure 2 compares the women and men from the 2001 and 2011 surveys of potential candidates to the college students from our 2012 survey. The 2001 and 2011 data show identical gender gaps: men were 16 percentage points more likely than women ever to have considered running for office at both points in time.<sup>5</sup> Notably, these gender gaps persisted across political party, income level, age, race, profession, and region. Most striking, however, is the third set of columns in the figure, which present the gender gap in ambition among college students today. Our survey results make clear that gender differences are well in place before women and men enter the professions from which most candidates emerge. Moreover, the gender gap in ambition is as large among the next generation of potential candidates as it is among adult samples of the candidate eligibility pool.



Notes: Data from 2001 and 2011 are based on responses from the Citizen Political Ambition Studies. Data from 2012 are drawn from Figure 1 of this report. Bars represent the percentage of men and women who fall into each category. The gender gap in each comparison is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

We do realize, of course, that the notion of running for office may seem very far off in the minds of college students. Accordingly, broad questions about political ambition could be a bit too removed from the respondents' lives to provide leverage for gauging interest in a political career. Thus, we measured the gender gap not only by asking explicitly about the likelihood of a future candidacy, but also by asking respondents a series of questions about jobs they would most like to hold in the future. Here, too, our results reveal notable gender differences in political ambition.

In a first scenario, we presented respondents with four career options – business owner, teacher, mayor of a city or town, and salesperson – and asked them which they would most like to be, assuming that each paid the same amount of money. Although both women and men ranked owning a business and being a teacher as more desirable than serving as a mayor, men were nearly twice as likely as women to select mayor as their preferred job (see Figure 3A). When we asked respondents which of the four positions they would least like to hold (results not shown), a substantial gender gap emerged as well. In fact, more women reported that they would rather be a salesperson than a mayor.



Notes: Data are based on responses from 1,012 men and 1,088 women. Bars represent the percentage of men and women who ranked each position as their most desirable when presented with the list of four options. The gender gaps for mayor and member of Congress are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

We then asked respondents to indicate which of the following four higher echelon jobs they found most appealing: business executive, lawyer, school principal, or member of Congress. Once again, women were significantly more likely than men to eschew the possibility of a political career. The data presented in Figure 3B reveal that men were nearly twice as likely as women to select a position as a member of Congress; and they ranked serving in Congress as more desirable than being a lawyer. Such was not the case for women; nearly 90 percent of female respondents preferred one of the non-political professions.

Finally, because many college students might not be enthusiastic about any of the careers we asked them to rank, we also provided respondents with a list of jobs and asked them to check off all they could imagine themselves holding in the future. This measure allows us to gain an understanding of young people's general openness toward various career choices.

**Table 2**  
**Openness toward Potential Jobs and Professions, by Sex**

	Men	Women
<b>Political Positions</b>		
President	9% *	3%
Member of Congress	13 *	6
Mayor of a City or Town	12 *	8
<b>Historically Female Careers</b>		
Teacher	22 *	30
Nurse	3 *	23
Secretary	5 *	18
<b>Historically Male Careers</b>		
Business Owner	32 *	26
Scientist	21 *	12
Doctor	14 *	18
Lawyer	12	12
Sample Size	1,020	1,097

Notes: Entries indicate percentage of respondents who reported that they would be interested in holding each job at some point in the future. \* indicates that the gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Table 2 presents the gender gaps in college students' receptivity toward three political positions, as well as a series of other careers that can be classified as either historically male or historically female. The survey results indicate that for all three public offices – president, member of Congress, and mayor – men were at least 50 percent more likely than women to be open to the position. The data also reflect gendered occupational segregation. Although we uncovered no gender difference in interest in being a lawyer, and women were more likely than men to report interest in a career in medicine, respondents' attitudes toward the remaining professions were consistent with stereotypic conceptions. That is, men were more likely than women to be attracted to business and science, whereas women were more likely than men to express interest in eventually being a teacher, nurse, or secretary. In fact, three times as many female respondents were open to being a secretary as were open to serving in Congress.

These gender gaps in political ambition are striking because female and male respondents were roughly equally likely to have participated in the political activities about which we asked. From voting, to attending a protest or rally, to blogging or emailing about a cause or issue, to posting about or following a politician or political issue on a social networking site, we uncovered comparable rates of activism. Women and men also held similar attitudes about politics and politicians; female respondents were no more likely than male respondents to hold politicians in low regard, for example. Thus, if attitudes toward politicians and levels of political activity situate college students to think about running for office, then the data suggest that female respondents are at least as well-positioned as their male counterparts.

So, what explains the striking gender gap in political ambition among college students? The remainder of this report attempts to answer this question by identifying and explicating five factors that work to young women's detriment.

## Five Factors that Hinder Young Women's Political Ambition

We identify five factors that help explain why – at such early stages in their lives – women and men differ so dramatically in their political ambition. Several of the findings speak to the longstanding effects of male respondents' more politicized formative experiences at home, school, and with their peers. Other findings point to the manner in which early experiences with competition and opportunities to build confidence carry lasting effects. But all five demonstrate that the presence of deeply embedded patterns of traditional gender socialization make becoming a candidate a less likely aspiration for young women than men. Together, our findings highlight the difficult road ahead if the United States seeks to climb toward gender parity in elective office.

### 1. Young men are more likely than young women to be socialized by their parents to think about politics as a possible career path.

Political socialization in the family is the premier agent in the development of young people's political attitudes and behavior.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, early political experiences can instill in many individuals the belief that they have the power to take part in the democratic process, whether by voting, engaging in other forms of political participation, or ultimately running for office. Thus, it is important to recognize that the women and men in our sample were exposed to similar patterns of general political socialization.

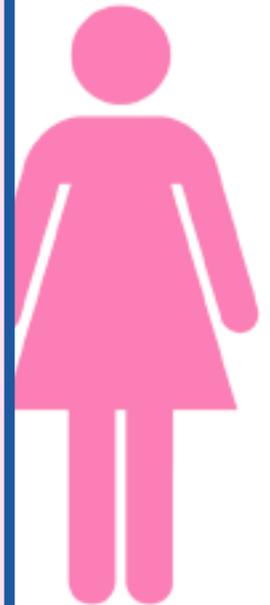
The data presented in the top half of Table 3 indicate that, with one exception, female and male college students were equally likely to grow up in households where news was consumed and political conversations ensued.

Table 3

### A Politicized Home Environment, by Sex

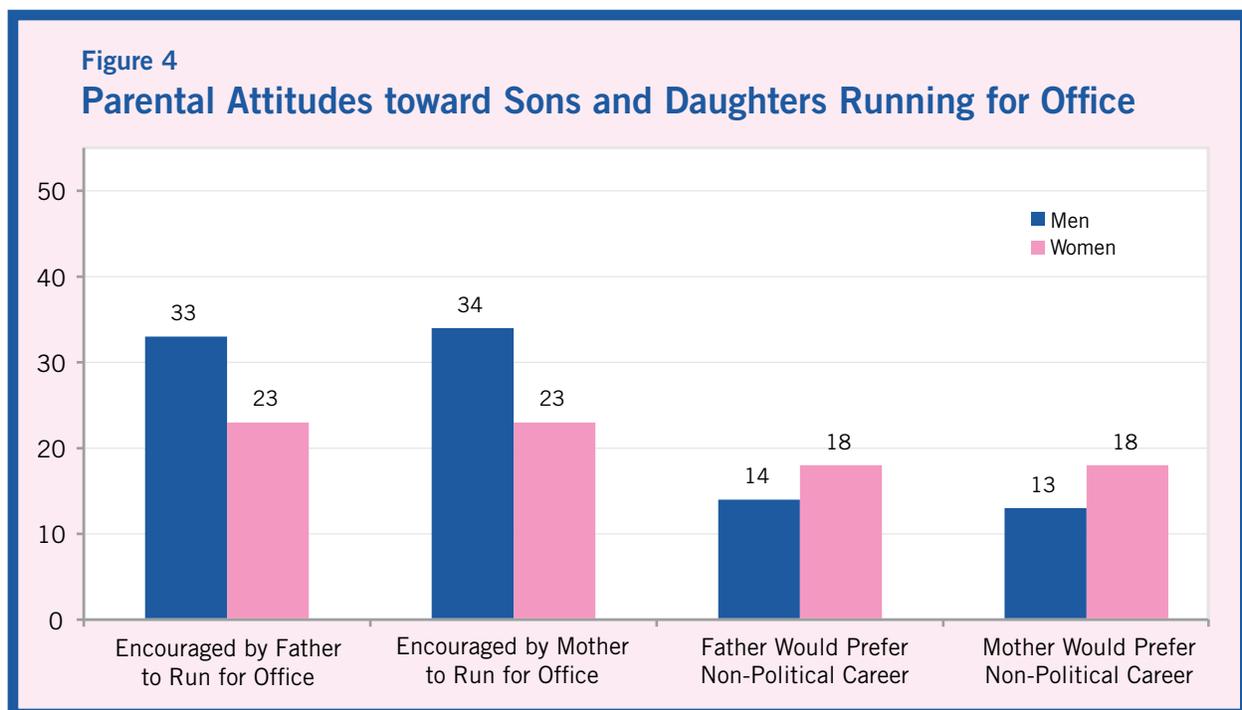
	Men	Women
<b>Presence of Politics in the Household When Growing Up</b>		
The news is often on.	48%	49%
We often talk about politics at meal times.	24 *	19
My parents often talk about politics with friends and family.	21	22
My parents sometimes yell at the TV because they are mad about politics.	14	17
<b>Political Activity with Parents</b>		
Followed the 2012 election with parents.	48 *	54
Watched election coverage with parents.	36	38
Discussed same-sex marriage with parents.	27 *	42
Discussed the environment and global warming with parents.	29	30
Discussed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with parents.	35	35
Shared a story on email, Facebook, or a social networking site with parents.	18 *	24
Sample Size	1,020	1,097

Notes: Entries indicate percentage of respondents who answered each question affirmatively or engaged in each political activity. \* indicates that the gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .



Further, the comparisons in the bottom half of the table highlight many similarities in the political activities with which young women and men engaged with their parents. The only notable gender differences that emerge work to women's advantage; female respondents were more likely than men to share news through social media and to discuss with their parents the 2012 election and the marriage equality debate.

The comparable patterns of political socialization to which female and male college students were exposed, however, change dramatically when we turn specifically to detailed questions about political ambition. The comparisons presented in Figure 4 reveal that women received less parental support to pursue a career in politics – from both mothers and fathers – than did men. Overall, 40 percent of male respondents, but only 29 percent of female respondents, reported encouragement to run for office later in life from at least one parent. Female respondents were also significantly more likely than their male counterparts to report that their parents would prefer them to pursue a career other than politics.



Notes: Data are based on responses from 1,020 men and 1,097 women. Bars represent the percentage of men and women who reported parental encouragement to run for office later in life, and that their parents would prefer them to pursue a non-political career in the future. All gender differences are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Parents who encourage their children to consider running for office exert a dramatic impact on their children's political ambition. Fifty percent of college students whose mothers regularly suggested that they run for office reported that they would definitely like to run in the future. Only 3 percent who received no such encouragement from their mothers expressed interest in a future candidacy. The results are similar for encouragement from fathers; 46 percent of respondents whose fathers supported a candidacy planned to run for office in the future, compared to 4 percent whose fathers did not.

**Women received less parental support to pursue a career in politics – from both mothers and fathers – than did men.**

Importantly, parental encouragement to run for office has the potential to be a great equalizer. That is, male and female college students who were regularly encouraged by their parents to think about

running for office were equally likely to articulate interest in a future candidacy. The problem, of course, is that despite comparable levels of political exposure and discussion in the households where they grew up, by the time they get to college, young men report higher levels of parental encouragement to run for office than do young women.

## 2. From their school experiences to their peer associations to their media habits, young women tend to be exposed to less political information and discussion than do young men.

School, peers, and the media are the key agents of political socialization beyond the family. It is no surprise, therefore, that a primary contributor to the gender gap in political ambition is the political context into which college students immerse themselves. Regardless of whether we focus on academics, extracurricular activities, peer relationships, or media habits, female respondents were less likely than male respondents to be surrounded by political discussion and information.

Beginning with class selection, men were more likely than women to gain exposure to politics and current events. More specifically, the comparisons presented in Table 4 reveal that men were 10 percent more likely than women to have taken a political science or government class, and almost 20 percent more likely to report discussing politics and current events in their classes. These gender gaps also emerge outside of formal educational experiences.

**Table 4**  
**Political Context at School and with Peers, by Sex**

	Men	Women
<b>Exposure to Politics in College</b>		
Has taken a political science or government class	72% *	66%
Frequently discusses politics and current events in college classes	35 *	30
<b>Political Activity in College</b>		
Participated in College Democrats or Republicans	16 *	9
Ran for student government position	12 *	8
Held student government position	8 *	5
<b>Politics with Peer Groups</b>		
Frequently discusses politics with friends	27 *	20
Frequently discusses current events with friends	48 *	42
Sample Size	996	1,080

Notes: Entries indicate percentage of respondents who answered each question affirmatively or engaged in each political activity. \* indicates that the gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Men were approximately two-thirds more likely than women to belong to either the College Democrats or College Republicans. And men were significantly more likely than women to have run for and held student government positions in college. This gender gap in student government marks a contrast with respondents' experiences in high school; women and men were equally likely to have participated in student government prior to college.

We also found substantial gender differences in the content of the college students' peer relationships. When we asked respondents about the topics of discussion in which they engaged with their friends, predictable gender differences emerged. Young men were more likely than women to report talking about sports; young women were more likely than men to converse about fashion, dating, and

school. But as the data in the bottom of Table 4 reveal, men were also significantly more likely than women to discuss politics and current events with their friends.

A similar pattern emerges when we turn to news gathering habits. Women and men were equally likely to watch cable news and read a newspaper. But we uncovered significant gender differences for three other political news sources. Men were two-thirds more likely than women to watch *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* or *The Colbert Report* (see Table 5). And they were significantly more likely than women to access political news and political blogs on the internet.

**Table 5**  
**Sources of Political Information, by Sex**

	Men	Women
<b>Engaged in each activity over the course of the last few days</b>		
Watched cable news (such as <i>Fox News</i> , <i>CNN</i> , or <i>MSNBC</i> )	40%	40%
Read a hard copy newspaper	19	19
Visited news websites	65 *	53
Visited political websites / blogs	45 *	32
Watched <i>The Daily Show with Jon Stewart</i> and/or <i>The Colbert Report</i>	25 *	15
Sample Size	1,009	1,083

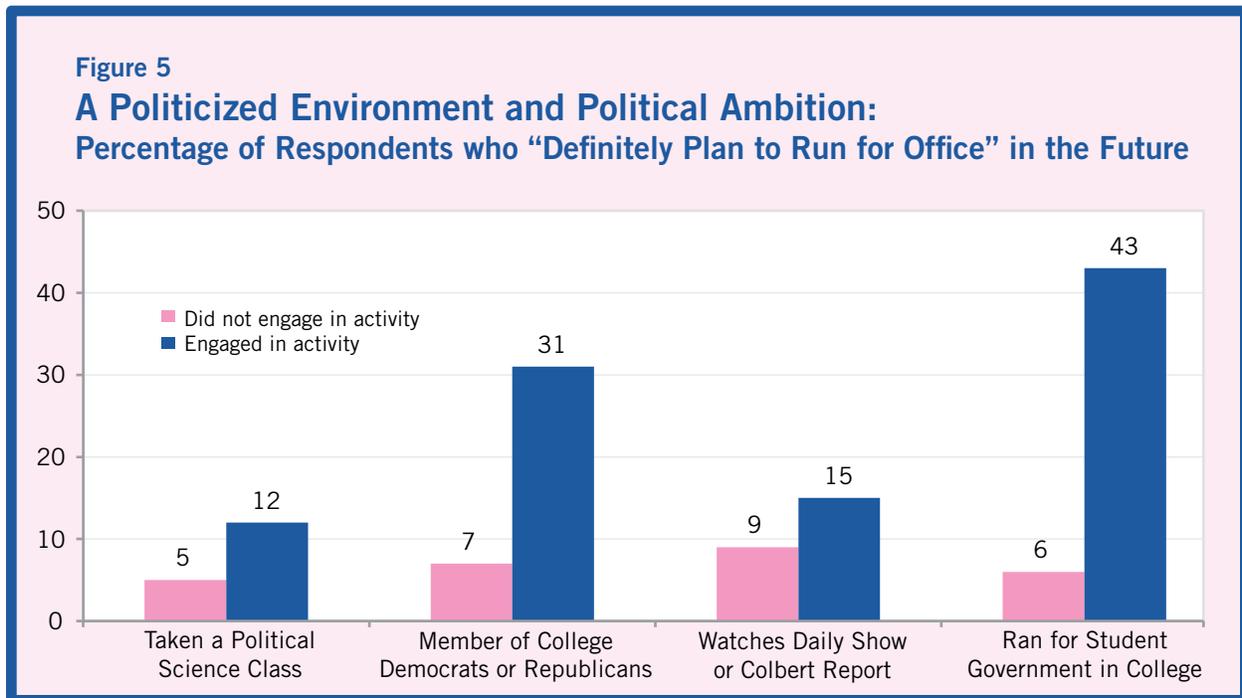
Notes: Entries indicate percentage of respondents who answered each question affirmatively. \* indicates that the gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Our survey results provide compelling evidence that, at school, with their peers, and through media, women are less likely than men to surround themselves with politics or devote time to gathering information and news about politics and current events. In fact, when asked about their overall levels of general political interest, 26 percent of men, but only 15 percent of women, described themselves as “very interested in politics and current events” (gender gap significant at  $p < .05$ ).

These gender differences carry clear implications for the gender gap in political ambition because people who are immersed in politics are more likely than those who are not to express interest in running for office. Figure 5 presents data that demonstrate the relationships between some of our key measures of a political environment and interest in running for office in the future. The figure compares respondents who possessed key ingredients associated with political ambition to those who did not.

All of the measures of political context presented in Figure 5 perform similarly. Those who had taken a political science class were more than twice as likely as those who had not to have plans to run for office. Members of the College Democrats or College Republicans were more than four times as likely as non-members to express definite interest in a candidacy. *Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* viewers were two-thirds more likely than non-viewers to report definite plans to run for public office in the future. And respondents who ran for student government during college were seven times more likely than their peers who had not run to articulate plans for a political career.

These data cannot speak to whether some degree of initial political interest triggered respondents' decisions to take political science classes, engage in political discussions with their friends, and acquire political information and news, or whether these experiences, themselves, fostered political interest. But for our purposes, what matters is that women are less likely than men to immerse themselves in the politicized environments associated with ambition to run for public office later in life.



Notes: Data are based on responses from 2,117 college students. Entries indicate the percentage of respondents who reported “definite” interest in running for office in the future. All differences are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

### 3. Young men are more likely than young women to have played organized sports and care about winning.

The extent to which college students are engaged in their school communities and participate in extracurricular activities plays an important role in preparing them for political activism later in life. Indeed, it is often through non-political organizations and associations that individuals acquire the civic skills necessary to thrive in political settings.<sup>7</sup> Hence, we asked respondents whether they participated in a wide range of activities, now or when they were younger, including music, drama, religious clubs, Greek organizations, volunteer associations, academic clubs, and sports. Few gender differences in participation emerged, with one notable exception: organized sports (see Table 6).

The survey results reveal that men were significantly more likely than women to play sports in college and to have played sports when they were younger. Moreover, among those who did play organized sports, women were only two-thirds as likely as men to consider sports “very important.” Women were also roughly one-third less likely than men to self-assess as “very competitive” and to report that winning was “very important.”

Even though sports participation might seem somewhat removed from political ambition, the competitiveness associated with sports appears to serve as a significant predictor of interest in running for office. Figure 6 compares the political ambition of women and men who play(ed) varsity or junior varsity sports with those who do (did) not. Women who played sports were approximately 25 percent more likely than those who did not to express political ambition. For men, the magnitude of the effect is smaller (roughly a 15 percent increase in ambition), but important nonetheless.<sup>8</sup> Although the gender gap in ambition remains substantial even among respondents who played sports, sports can mitigate the gap considerably. If we compare women who played sports to men who did not, then what began as a 20 percentage point overall gender gap in ambition (see Figure 1) narrows to one that is nearly half the size (11 points).

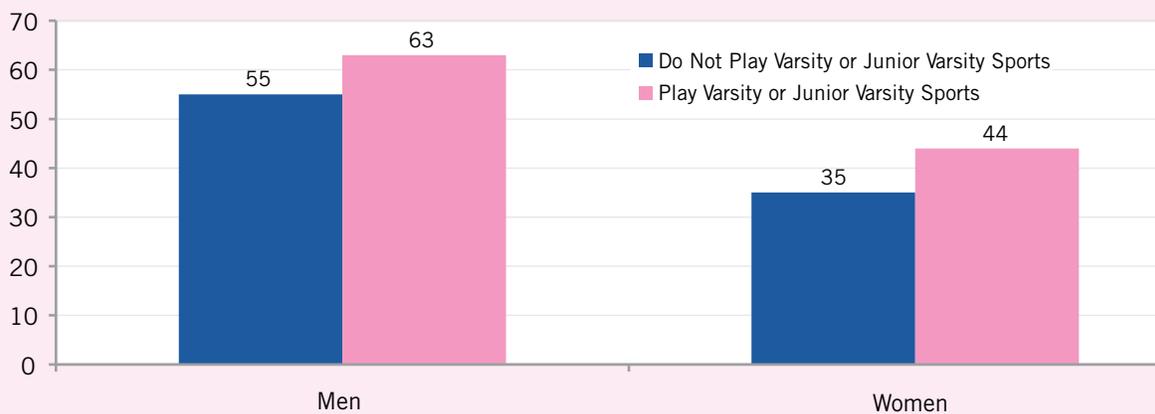
**Table 6**  
**Participation in Organized Sports and Attitudes toward Competition, by Sex**

	Men	Women
<b>Organized sports in college</b>		
Plays a varsity or junior varsity sport	38% *	26%
Plays an intramural sport	36 *	15
<b>When you were younger, did you play on any sports teams?</b>		
No, I never played on any sports teams.	13 *	28
Yes, I played sports, but they were never very important to me.	14 *	18
Yes, I played sports and enjoyed them, but they were only one activity.	36	33
Yes, I played sports and they were very important to me.	37 *	21
<b>When playing sports, how competitive are you?</b>		
Not competitive. As long as it's fun, I don't care if I win.	11 *	16
Somewhat competitive and I prefer to win.	44 *	52
Very competitive. It is very important to me that I win.	44 *	32
Sample Size	1,014	1,089

Notes: For levels of competitiveness when playing sports, the sample is restricted to respondents who play or have played on any sports teams. \* indicates that the gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Overall, our results suggest that playing organized sports either provides an opportunity to develop, or reinforces the propensity toward, a competitive spirit. These characteristics relate to running for elective office later in life, and this effect is evident in both female and male college students. Because men are still substantially more likely than women to play sports and to exude competitive traits, however, they are also far more likely to find themselves in a position to direct that competitive drive into politics.

**Figure 6**  
**The Link between Participating in Sports and Political Ambition: Have you ever thought that, someday, when you're older, you might want to run for political office?**



Notes: Data are based on responses from 1,014 men and 1,089 women. Bars represent the percentage of men and women who report that running for office in the future has at least "crossed their mind." The gender gaps are statistically significant at  $p < .05$  in both comparisons.

#### 4. Young women are less likely than young men to receive encouragement to run for office – from anyone.

Recruitment and encouragement lead many individuals who might otherwise never consider running for office to emerge as candidates. In previous research, we found this type of encouragement to serve as one of the strongest predictors of political ambition. But we also found that women were less likely than men to receive that support – whether from political actors, such as party leaders, elected officials, and political activists, or from more personal contacts, like colleagues, family members, and friends. A similar – albeit somewhat more nuanced – story emerges from our survey of college students.

At various stages throughout their lives, students are presented with opportunities to run for office. Campaigns for student councils in elementary, middle, and high school, to races for student government positions in college, can provide young people with the first taste of what it might be like to seek elective office as an adult. Consequently, we examined whether respondents received encouragement to run for student government, as well as for political office in the future.

The first two columns in Table 7 provide comparisons between female and male respondents on the question of whether various people in their lives ever encouraged them to run for student government (either in high school or college). We found virtually no gender differences. Women and men were equally likely to report receiving encouragement to run for student government from their parents, teachers, and friends. They were also just as likely to receive encouragement from multiple sources; roughly one in five respondents was encouraged to seek a student government position by at least three sources.

Table 7

#### Gender Differences in Encouragement to Run for Office

	Encouraged to Run for Student Government		Encouraged to Run for Office Later in Life	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Parent	24%	25%	40% *	29%
Grandparent	9	7	14 *	9
Aunt / Uncle	9	6	10 *	7
Sibling	8	9	10 *	7
Teacher	19	18	19 *	12
Coach	5 *	3	7 *	4
Religious Leader	4	4	7 *	4
Friend	22	22	26 *	17
Received suggestion from three or more sources	20	19	19 *	13
Sample Size	1,020	1,097	1,020	1,097

Notes: Entries indicate percentage of respondents who ever received encouragement or the suggestion to run for office from each source. \* indicates that the gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

When we turn to encouragement to run for public office later in life, however, gender equity gives way to patterns that favor male respondents. The comparisons presented in the right-hand columns of Table 7 reveal striking and significant gender gaps in every case about which we asked. Men were

more likely than women to receive the suggestion to run for office later in life from all types of family members, mentors, and peers with whom they regularly interact. Overall, 35 percent of women, compared to 49 percent of men, received encouragement to run for public office from at least one source.

Undoubtedly, these results can be explained at least partially by the reality that men were more likely than women to navigate politicized environments. But regardless of the root of the gender differences, the effects of encouragement to run for office are substantial. Sixty-six percent of women who received any encouragement to run for office reported interest in a future candidacy, compared to 21 percent who never received encouragement to run. For men, 84 percent of those who were encouraged to run for office considered doing so, while just 32 percent who did not receive encouragement were open to running for office in the future.

Clearly, encouragement to run for office motivates many young women and men to consider a future candidacy. But women are substantially less likely than men to receive this encouragement at all, as well as to have it come from multiple sources.

## 5. Young women are less likely than young men to think they will be qualified to run for office, even once they are established in their careers.

Our 2001 and 2011 studies of adults in the candidate eligibility pool revealed that a central barrier keeping women from emerging as candidates pertained to self-perceptions of qualifications to run for office. Men were almost 60 percent more likely than women to view themselves as “very qualified” to run for office. Women were more than twice as likely as men to rate themselves as “not at all qualified.” These gendered perceptions existed despite women and men’s comparable educational and occupational backgrounds and professional success. This is the same pattern we uncovered among the college students.

We asked respondents whether they thought that, after they finish college and have been working for a while, they will know enough and be sufficiently prepared to run for office. The data presented in Figure 7 reveal that men were more than twice as likely as women to answer the question affirmatively. Women, on the other hand, were 50 percent more likely than men to doubt that they would be qualified candidates.

Women were more likely than men to question their qualifications not only in the broadest sense, but also to express less confidence when asked about their politically-relevant skills. Men were more likely than women, for example, to contend that they were good at public speaking (35 percent of men, compared to 29 percent of women). And they were also more likely than women to assert that they knew a lot about politics (22 percent of men, compared to 14 percent of women).

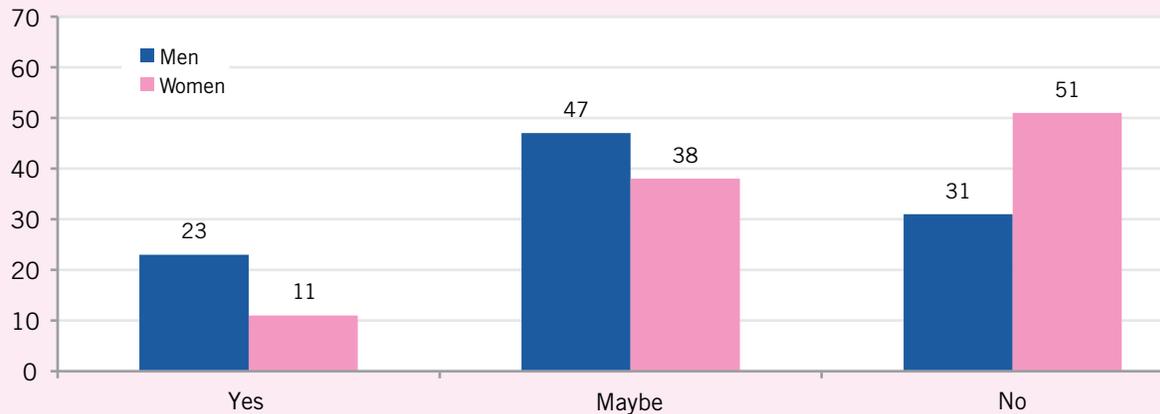
Women’s self-doubts are important because they play a substantial role in depressing the likelihood of considering a candidacy. Among those who thought they might be qualified to run, 53 percent of women, compared to 66 percent of men, had considered politics a viable option for the future. There was also a gender gap among those who doubted their qualifications. Only 15 percent of women who did not think they would be qualified to run for office had considered a political career; 23 percent of men who did not think they would be qualified to run for office had given the notion of a candidacy at least some thought.

**Among those who thought they might be qualified to run, 53 percent of women, compared to 66 percent of men, had considered politics a viable option for the future.**



Figure 7

**The Gender Gap in Self-Perceived Qualifications:  
When you have finished school and have been working for a while, do you  
think you will know enough to run for political office?**



Notes: Data are based on responses from 1,020 men and 1,097 women. Bars represent the percentage of men and women who fall into each category. The gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$  for all comparisons.

These data are problematic for women's numeric representation for two reasons. First, women and men are more likely to consider running for office when they consider themselves qualified to do so. Our findings indicate that young women are significantly less likely than young men to believe that they will meet the qualifications. Second, self-doubts appear to inhibit female college students' interest in running for office more so than they do men's. After all, men who did not think they would be qualified to run for office were 50 percent more likely than women who felt the same way still to consider a candidacy. And men who thought they "might" be qualified were 25 percent more likely than their female counterparts to express interest in running for office. Women, therefore, are doubly disadvantaged on the qualifications criterion.

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

Former President Bill Clinton writes in his memoir, "Sometime in my sixteenth year I decided I wanted to be in public life as an elected official . . . I knew I could be great in public service."<sup>9</sup> Beau Biden, the former Attorney General of Delaware and son of Vice President Joe Biden recalls, "You couldn't leave my dinner table without the sense that you had an obligation . . . to try to impact your world . . . Eating was almost incidental to the discussion."<sup>10</sup> Lisa Murkowski, U.S. Senator and daughter of former Alaska Governor and U.S. Senator Frank Murkowski, recounts a similar memory: "When you are around politics . . . when you are younger and exposed to it, you look at it and say, 'I could do that.'"<sup>11</sup> Although Clinton, Biden, and Murkowski might be unusual in the levels of electoral office they sought and success they achieved, their stories illustrate the powerful effects that political ambition early in life can exude on an individual's career path. Indeed, these anecdotes are consistent with our previous analyses of potential candidates; the seeds are often planted for an eventual candidacy early in life, often by the time women and men are college students.<sup>12</sup>

If we are to gain a full understanding of the origins of the gender gap in political ambition, therefore, then it is essential to survey individuals at a time that is more proximate to the socializing agents and experiences that affect interest in running for office later in life. Only then can we examine the role gender plays in the earliest stages of the candidate emergence process and evaluate long-term prospects for women's full inclusion in U.S. political institutions. This report provides the first attempt to do so.

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

- We uncovered a substantial gender gap in political ambition among college students. Women were less likely than men ever to have considered running for office, to express interest in a candidacy at some point in the future, and to consider elective office a desirable profession.
- The size of the gender gap in political ambition among college students is comparable to the size of the gap we previously uncovered in studies of “potential candidates” – lawyers, business leaders, educators, and political activists. Our data suggest, therefore, that the gender gap in ambition is already well in place among college students.
- Family, school, peers, and media habits work in concert to trigger and sustain young men's political interest and ambition. Young women, on the other hand, are less exposed to environments that would push them to consider running for office later in life. Further, women are less likely than men to receive encouragement to run for office and are more likely to doubt their political qualifications.

The findings from our study suggest that the gender gap in political ambition, as well as the consequences for women's numeric representation, will likely persist into the foreseeable future. But this is not because women have a lesser sense of civic duty or different aspirations for the future than do men. In fact, the data presented in Table 8 demonstrate that women and men reported very similar life goals; they were equally likely to want children, earn a lot of money, and achieve career success. The main difference is that women were more likely than men to aspire to volunteer to improve their communities.

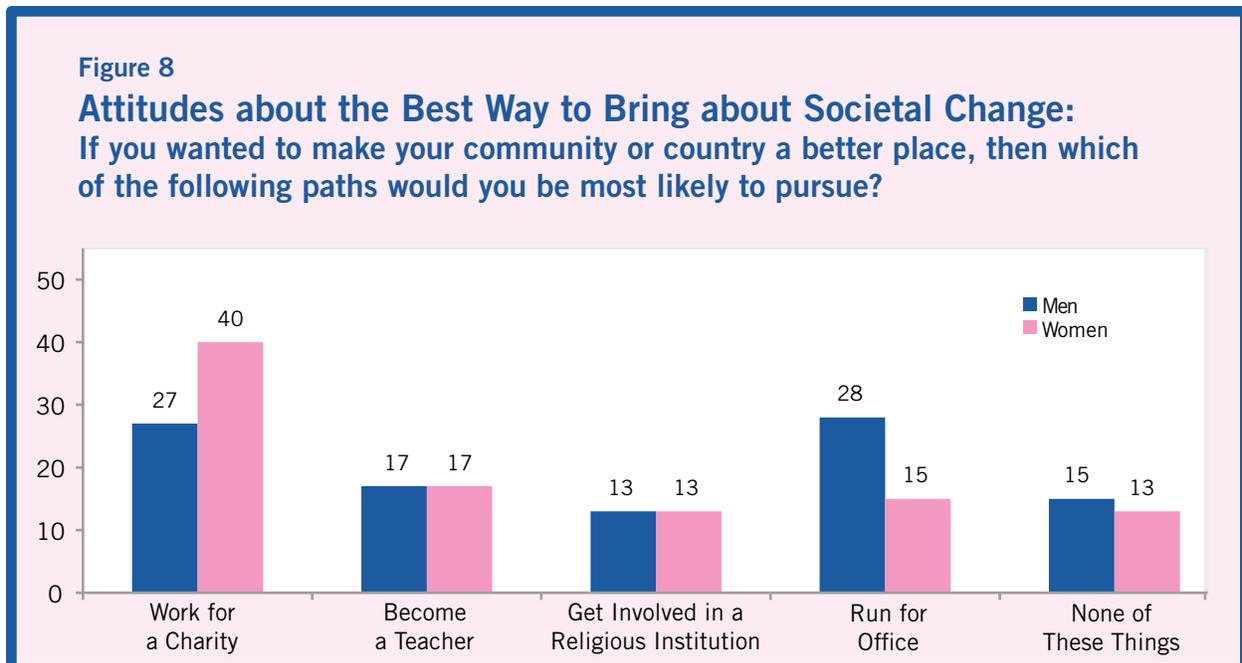
**Table 8**

**Aspirations for the Future, by Sex:  
When thinking about the future, how important is it  
that you...?**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Get married	79% *	84%
Have children	78	80
Earn a lot of money	85	84
Become very successful at your job	96	96
Volunteer to help improve your community	73 *	83
Sample Size	1,020	1,097

Notes: Entries indicate percentage of respondents who said that each goal is “important” or “very important.” \* indicates that the gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

Yet despite their similar life goals, women and men reported very different views when asked about the most effective way to bring about societal change. Female respondents were 50 percent more likely than male respondents to say that working for a charity is the best way to bring about change. Men, on the other hand, were nearly twice as likely as women to see running for elective office as the best way to bring about change (see Figure 8). Women and men both aspire to work to improve the world around them. But women are much less likely than men to see political leadership as a means to that end. Our findings, in essence, highlight the importance of deepening our understanding of the manner in which young women and men in contemporary society are still socialized about politics, the acquisition of political power, and the characteristics that qualify individuals to seek it.



Notes: Data are based on responses from 1,013 men and 1,088 women. Bars represent the percentage of men and women who selected each path as the best way to bring about societal change. The gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$  for “work for a charity” and “run for office.”

At a practical level, though, our findings offer some direction for those interested in increasing the number of young women aspiring to seek and hold elective office.

- First, the data reveal that, although young women are less likely than young men ever to have considered running for office, they are just as likely as men to respond positively to encouragement to run. Early parental support for a political career, therefore, is a vital ingredient for closing the gender gap in political ambition. Yet parents are not equally likely to encourage their college sons and daughters to consider running for office later in life. Because mothers and fathers are just as likely to speak to their daughters as they are their sons about politics, though, urging parents to expand their political discussions to include careers in politics could close the gender gap.
- Second, a substantial barrier to thinking about a political career for many female college students is less exposure to organized sports and the competitive spirit they foster and/or reinforce. Encouraging young women to play sports from an early age might generate a greater sense of competition and, ultimately, political ambition among young women.

- Finally, organizational efforts to engage young women politically can only help close the gender gap in political ambition. Because female college students are less likely than men to take political science classes, discuss politics with their friends, and seek out political information through the media, there are substantial opportunities for interventions by women's organizations – on college campuses and nationally – to make a difference. Exposing young women to female candidates and elected officials and providing examples of how pursuing electoral office can bring about societal change cannot be underestimated in closing the gap. These activities can also go a long way in combating women's tendency to self-assess as unqualified to run for office.

**Although young women are less likely than young men ever to have considered running for office, they are just as likely as men to respond positively to encouragement to run. Early parental support for a political career, therefore, is a vital ingredient for closing the gender gap in political ambition.**



This report makes clear that we still have a long way to go before women and men express equal interest in and comfort with the idea of running for office. But our results suggest that focusing on the premier agents of political socialization – family, peers, school, and media – and being attentive to the manner in which they facilitate men's interest in a future candidacy, but detract from women's, can help narrow the gender gap in political ambition. Certainly, these are daunting challenges and involve complex change, but concerns about democratic legitimacy and political accountability necessitate that we continue to examine and work to ameliorate gender disparities in political ambition (see Appendix B for research on the substantive and symbolic benefits women in politics bring to the political sphere).

## Appendix A: Data Collection and the Sample

We conducted our survey of college students through GfK Custom Research LLC (formerly *Knowledge Networks*), a top survey research firm that is frequently used for political science research because it relies on a probability-based online non-volunteer access panel. KnowledgePanel members are recruited using a statistically valid sampling method with a published sample frame of residential addresses that covers approximately 98 percent of U.S. households. Once panel members are profiled, they become “active” for selection for specific surveys. Samples are drawn from among active members using a probability proportional to size weighted sampling approach. Customized stratified random sampling based on profile data is also conducted.<sup>13</sup> Our sample, therefore, is a broad cross-section of college students. Of equal importance for our purposes, male and female respondents are roughly equal in terms of race, religion, household income, region, and age (see Table 9).

**Table 9**  
**Sample Demographics**

	Men	Women
<b>Party Affiliation</b>		
Democrat	43% *	49%
Independent	11	10
Republican	26 *	21
Other or No political party affiliation	20	20
<b>Race</b>		
White	56	58
Black	12	13
Latino / Hispanic	19 *	15
Other	13	11
<b>Region</b>		
Northeast	19	16
Midwest	23	24
South	32 *	37
West	26	23
<b>Estimated Household Income</b>		
Less than \$50,000	57 *	62
\$50,000 - \$99,999	29	25
\$100,00 - \$149,000	10	8
At least \$150,000	4	5
<b>Religion</b>		
Protestant	28 *	33
Catholic	26	23
Jewish	3	2
Muslim	1	1
Mormon	2	1
Other	13	13
Not part of any religion	29	27
Mean Age (Years)	21	21
Sample Size	1,020	1,097

Notes: Number of cases varies slightly, as some respondents omitted answers to some questions. Independents include partisan leaners.

\* indicates that the gender gap is statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

## Appendix B: 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. Steuarnagel. 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 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.

## Notes

- 1 Based on her analysis 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 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 Reactions to Women Candidates." In *Women and Elective Office*, eds. S. Thomas and C. Wilcox. New York: Oxford University Press; and Seltzer, R.A., J. Newman, and M. Voorhees Leighton. 1997. *Sex as a Political Variable*. Boulder: Lynne Reinner.
- 2 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. 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. Although the 2012 elections did not represent a net loss as far as women's numeric representation is concerned, the gains represented only a 2 percent overall increase – this is especially low given that 2012 was a redistricting year that presented relatively more electoral opportunities and open seats than is typically the case. 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. Certainly, cultural and political components 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.
- 3 Certainly, 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. Thus, 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.
- 4 The results from these studies were widely disseminated. In addition to a series of academic journal articles and two policy reports, the results from the 2001 survey served as the basis of a book: Lawless, Jennifer L. 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: Lawless, Jennifer L. 2012. *Becoming a Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press; and Lawless, Jennifer L. and Richard L. Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press. And in January 2012, we released "Men Rule: The Continued Under-Representation of Women in U.S. Politics," a policy report based on the 2011 data.

- 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 the seemingly gender neutral "end-stage" of the electoral process.
- 6 For the last forty years, political scientists have provided compelling evidence of the transmission of political attitudes and activism through the family unit. Political party affiliation tends to be handed down from parent to child (Fiorina, Morris P. 1983. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Acock, Alan C. and Vern L. Bengston. 1978. "On the Relative Influence of Mothers and Fathers: A Covariance Analysis of Political and Religious Socialization." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 40(3):519-30; Niemi, Richard G., R. Danforth Ross, and Joseph Alexander. 1978. "The Similarity of Political Values of Parents and College Age Youths." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 42(4):503-20).

Attitudes about what constitutes good citizenship often become deeply embedded based on family upbringing (Beck, Paul Allen and M. Kent Jennings. 1982. "Pathways to Participation." *American Political Science Review* 76(1):94-108). And early political experiences can predict future levels of political activism and interest (Gaddie, Ronald Keith. 2004. *Born to Run: Origins of the Political Career*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield; Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Paulsen, Ronnelle. 1991. "Education, Social Class, and Participation in Collective Action." *Sociology of Education* 64(2):96-110; Jennings, M. Kent and Gregory B. Markus. 1984. "Partisan Orientations over the Long Haul: Results from the Three-Wave Political Socialization Panel Study." *American Political Science Review* 78(4):1000-18; Beck, Paul Allen and M. Kent Jennings. 1982. "Pathways to Participation." *American Political Science Review* 76(1):94-108; Hanks, Michael. 1981. "Youth, Voluntary Associations and Political Socialization." *Social Forces* 60(1):211-23).

Moreover, recent studies suggest that adolescents who discuss politics with their parents develop higher levels of political knowledge and demonstrate a greater propensity to vote, attend community meetings, and engage the political system through signing petitions, participating in boycotts, or contributing money (McIntosh, Hugh, Daniel Hart, and James Youniss. 2007. "The Influence of Family Political Discussion on Youth Civic Development: Which Parent Qualities Matter?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 40(3):495-99; Andolina, Molly W., Krista Jenkins, Cliff Zukin, and Scott Keeter. 2003. "Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 36(2):275-80; see also Pacheco, Julianna Sandell. 2008. "Political Socialization in Context: The Effect of Political Competition on Youth Voter Turnout." *Political Behavior* 30(4):415-36).

- 7 These experiences can translate into the political arena similar to the manner in which civic skills often acquired in non-political settings can foster political participation at the mass level (see Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- 8 The results are very similar if we focus on intramural, as opposed to varsity or junior varsity, sports. More specifically, men who played intramural sports were seven percentage points more likely than men who had not played sports to have considered running for office (62 percent compared to 55 percent). For women, the gap was nine percentage points for intramural sports; 45 percent of women who played intramural sports had considered running for office, compared to 36 percent of women who had not played sports. In other words, the caliber of sports team does not seem to drive the result. Mere participation on the team confers explanatory power.
- 9 Clinton, Bill. 2004. *My Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Page 63.
- 10 Canton, Shannon. "Family Business." *Delaware Today*, July 2003. Accessed at: <http://www.delawaretoday.com/Delaware-Today/September-2008/The-Biden-Archive-Family-Business/> (February 26, 2013).
- 11 Hulse, Carl. "On Capitol Hill, a Family Business Thrives." *New York Times*, December 20, 2008, page A4.
- 12 See, for example, Fox, Richard L. and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2005. "To Run or Not to Run for Office: Explaining Nascent Political Ambition." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(3):659-76; and Lawless, Jennifer L. 2012. *Becoming a Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- 13 In this case, KnowledgePanel members were supplemented with a companion sample of respondents from an opt-in web panel. The same screening criteria are used for both sample sources to identify the eligible sample for the interview (e.g., college students). The KnowledgePanel interviews serve an important function by providing the statistical information needed to calibrate the interviews from the non-probability sample source. The calibration is useful in correcting for sampling error and self-selection bias in the non-probability web panels.

## About the Authors



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