



Reflective Democracy: Ballot Demographics

Overview

As has been seen in our previous Who Leads Us analysis, there is a severe under-representation of both women and people of color at all levels of elected government. In this study, we attempt to take the first steps toward finding an answer as to why this is.

Working from datasets from the 2012 and 2014 November general elections, this analysis compiled a list of 60,285 candidates who appeared on voters' ballots. Of these, we have identified the race and gender of 51,281 candidates. Our analysis shows that the race and gender composition of candidates on the ballot closely mirrors that of elected officials in general. In aggregate, 89.8% of candidates identified were white, 72.6% were male, and 65.7% were white males.

Overall Numbers

The overall breakdown of candidates across both cycles is as follows:

All Candidates	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	3.3%	6.9%	10.2%
White	24.1%	65.7%	89.8%
Grand Total	27.4%	72.6%	100.00%

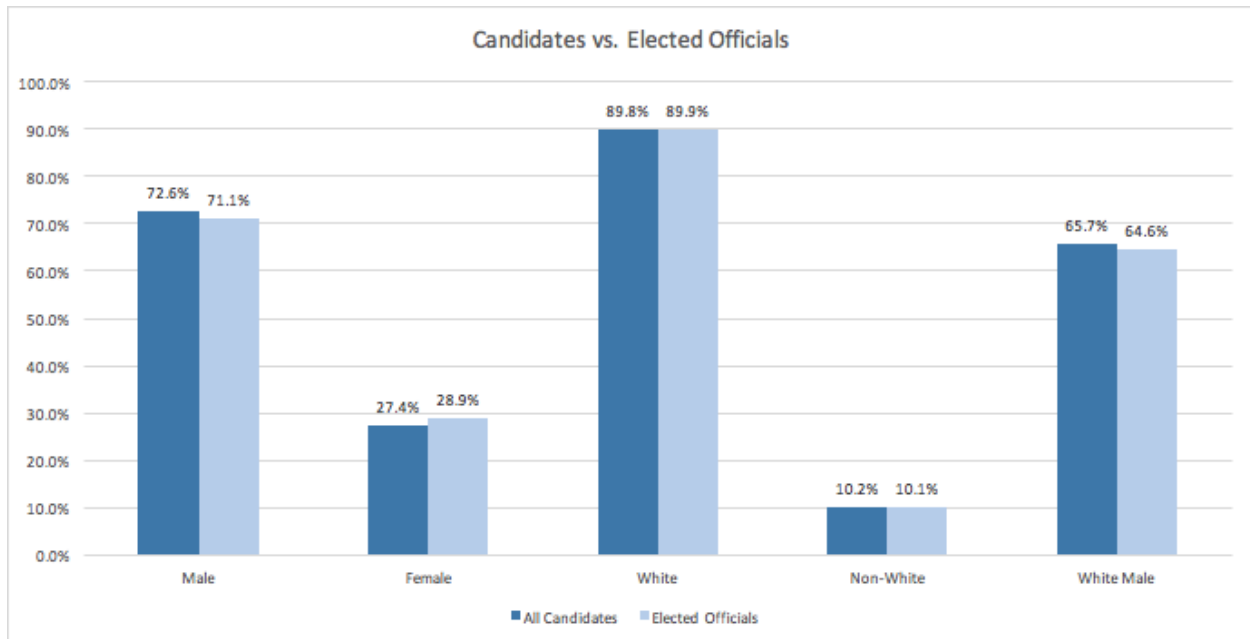
These numbers are consistent looking at both 2012 and 2014 numbers. Of the 26,128 candidates identified from 2014, the breakdown:

2014 Candidates	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	3.5%	7.0%	10.5%
White	24.3%	65.2%	89.5%
Grand Total	27.8%	72.2%	100.0%

And for the 25,153 candidates identified in 2012:

2012 Candidates	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	3.2%	6.8%	10.0%
White	23.8%	66.3%	90.0%
Grand Total	26.9%	73.1%	100.0%

The similarity of the composition of candidates, compared to elected officials, is striking:



This strong similarity could in part be attributed to a strong incumbency bias, especially in unopposed local races. It may also be that the primary election had a more diverse field, and the remaining candidates for the general election already reflect a narrowing of the field by primary voters. Both of these hypotheses merit future research, though it is unlikely that either explanation would completely eliminate the extreme disparity between the race and gender of candidates and the electorate.

By Office Level

All office levels showed significant under-representation of both women and people of color, but some patterns begin to emerge when looking at how the data splits. The proportion of white male candidates is higher for higher office levels, with women gaining a larger proportional share at the lower office levels. These gains are primarily from an increased number of white women, however, as people of color are actually found as candidates in higher proportions in higher offices. This is likely due to the large number of counties and smaller jurisdictions with extremely low non-white populations, and tracks with the data seen in the elected official analysis.

All years

Federal	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	4.3%	11.4%	15.7%
White	13.1%	71.2%	84.3%
Grand Total	17.4%	82.6%	100.0%

State	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	5.4%	7.5%	12.9%
White	20.2%	66.9%	87.1%
Grand Total	25.6%	74.4%	100.0%

State Leg	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	4.3%	8.5%	12.8%
White	22.0%	65.2%	87.2%
Grand Total	26.3%	73.8%	100.0%

Local	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	2.7%	5.6%	8.3%
White	26.1%	65.6%	91.7%
Grand Total	28.8%	71.2%	100.0%

Office Levels: 2012 vs 2014

In this section we will look at how each of these office levels changed between 2012 & 2014.

2012 vs 2014 Federal

At the federal level, there were only slight changes between the years, with slightly more women running in 2012 than 2014, though women of color were actually more represented in 2014.

2012 Federal	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	3.8%	11.4%	15.2%
White	14.5%	70.3%	84.8%
Grand Total	18.3%	81.7%	100.0%

2014 Federal	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	4.7%	11.5%	16.2%
White	11.7%	72.1%	83.8%
Grand Total	16.4%	83.6%	100.0%

2012 vs 2014 State

The state level saw significant increases in representation for people of color on the ballot in 2014, though this office level has a comparatively small pool of candidates (840 across all years) and so should be expected to be more volatile in general.

2012 State	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	3.6%	3.6%	7.1%
White	23.1%	69.8%	92.9%
Grand Total	26.7%	73.3%	100.0%

2014 State	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	6.0%	8.9%	15.0%
White	19.2%	65.9%	85.0%
Grand Total	25.2%	74.8%	100.0%

2012 vs 2014 State Legislature

At the state legislature level, both women and people of color saw a slight increase on the 2014 ballot.

2012 St Leg	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	3.9%	7.8%	11.7%
White	21.6%	66.7%	88.3%
Grand Total	25.6%	74.4%	100.0%

2014 St Leg	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	4.6%	9.3%	13.9%
White	22.3%	63.8%	86.1%
Grand Total	26.9%	73.1%	100.0%

2012 vs 2014 Local

At the county level and below, 2014 saw a slight decrease in people of color on the ballot, but was overall very consistent.

2012 Local	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	2.7%	5.9%	8.6%
White	25.7%	65.7%	91.4%
Grand Total	28.4%	71.6%	100.0%

2014 Local	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	2.7%	5.3%	8.0%
White	26.5%	65.5%	92.0%
Grand Total	29.2%	70.8%	100.0%

By Party

Since party officials are often the primary gatekeepers that determine ballot access, it is useful to look at a breakdown of demographics for each party¹. We find that both Democrats and Republican candidates are overwhelmingly white males, though slightly more so for Republicans. Additionally, we find that non-partisan and independent candidates, who comprise a large percentage of candidates for local offices nationwide, track largely with the overall trend.

Democratic	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	6.2%	11.4%	17.6%
White	27.0%	55.4%	82.4%
Grand Total	33.2%	66.8%	100.0%

¹ In states that allow fusion balloting, primarily New York and Connecticut, candidates may be listed on multiple ballot lines in multiple parties. In these instances, candidates were counted only once and associated with the major party that endorsed them, if any. These adjustments also are reflected in the state-by-state breakdowns and the analysis of unopposed contests.

Republican	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	1.2%	3.1%	4.3%
White	23.0%	72.7%	95.7%
Grand Total	24.2%	75.8%	100.0%

Non-Partisan/ Independent	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	2.6%	7.3%	9.9%
White	21.2%	68.9%	90.1%
Grand Total	23.7%	76.3%	100.0%

State by State Analysis

A breakdown of [state numbers can be found here](#). To view these in map form, the following maps are available:

[State Percentage of White Candidates](#)

[State Percentage of Male Candidates](#)

[State Percentage of White Male Candidates](#)

Notably, 35 states had over 70% male candidates on the ballot, and all but one had more than 60% (Wisconsin, with a not exactly world beating 59.5%). Forty states had over 80% white candidates, with 20 states' ballots more than 95% white². [A view of each state in bar graph form can be found here](#).

Deep Dive: A Tale of Four States

We can see at how the overall trends of ballot demographics work at a micro-level by taking a look at four states: Georgia, Maryland, Ohio, and Washington³. While these states have little in

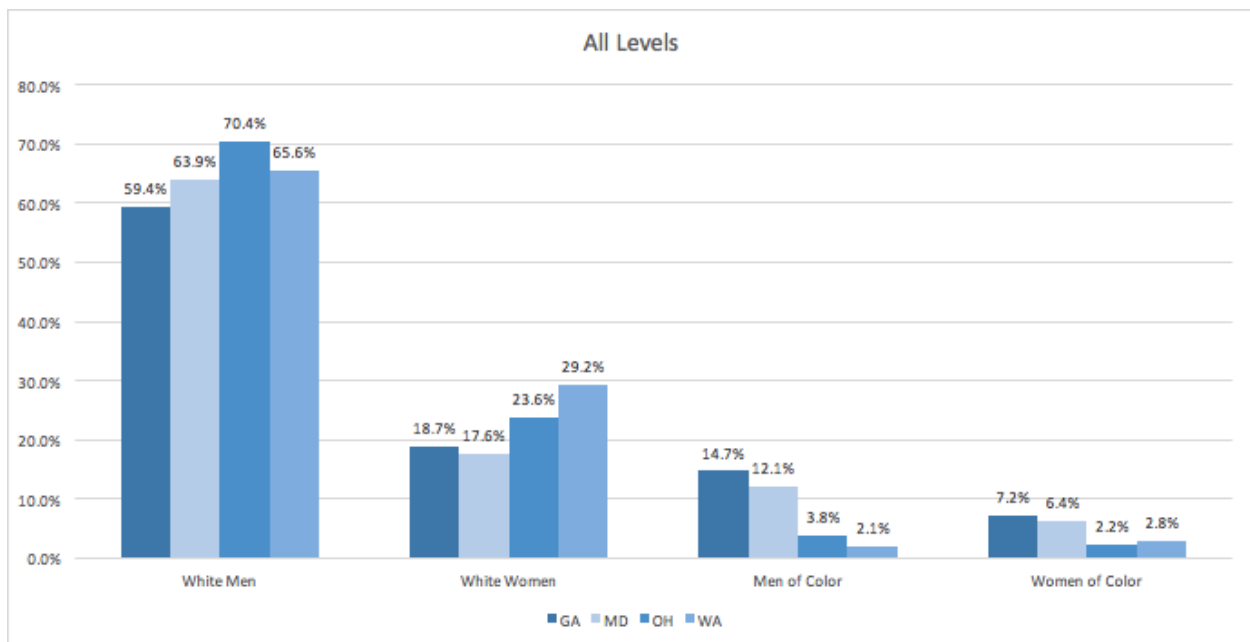
² While state-by-state numbers are useful for comparative purposes, it should be noted that these numbers could be affected by the smaller number of candidates in each state. Additionally, some states hold their state legislature elections in odd years, which are not included in the baseline datasets, making it difficult to draw true apples-to-apples conclusions everywhere.

³ Since the relatively small sample of candidates in state subsets mean that any data inaccuracies in the data are amplified in the final statistics, the focus of this section is to illustrate trends rather than to examine the precise breakdown.

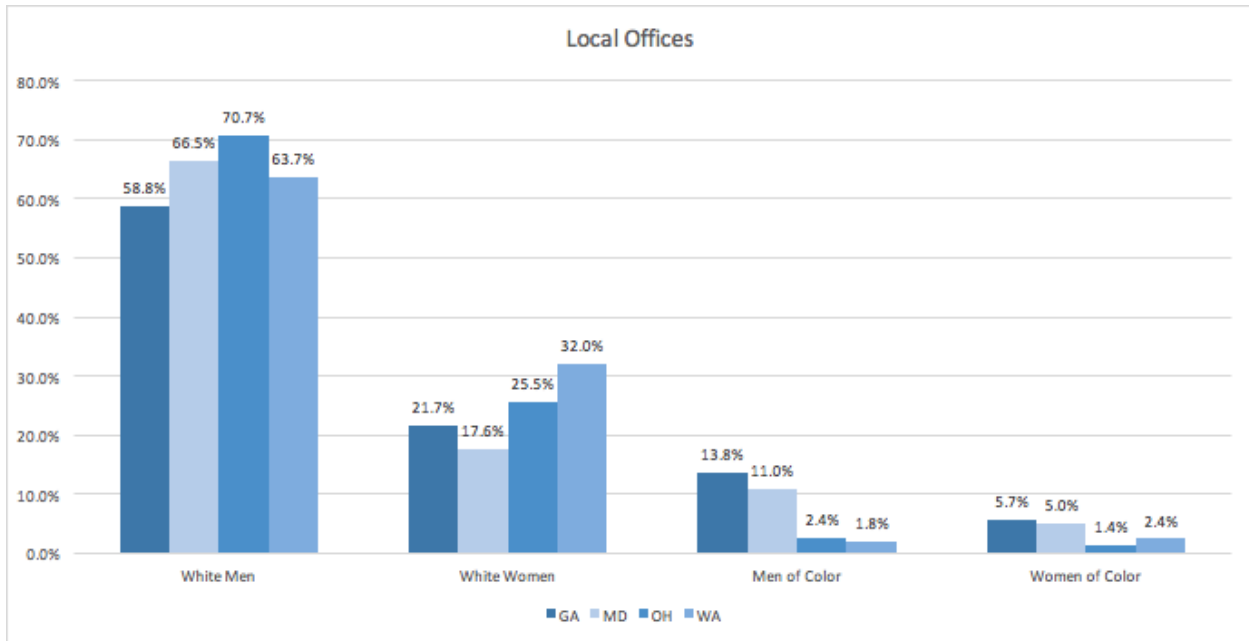
common on the surface, their ballot numbers are illustrative of how these trends are appearing across diverse geographies and populations.

Looking at the overall numbers for the four states, we can see immediately that white men are the dominant category appearing on the ballot, with women of color being rarely seen as candidates in any of the states.

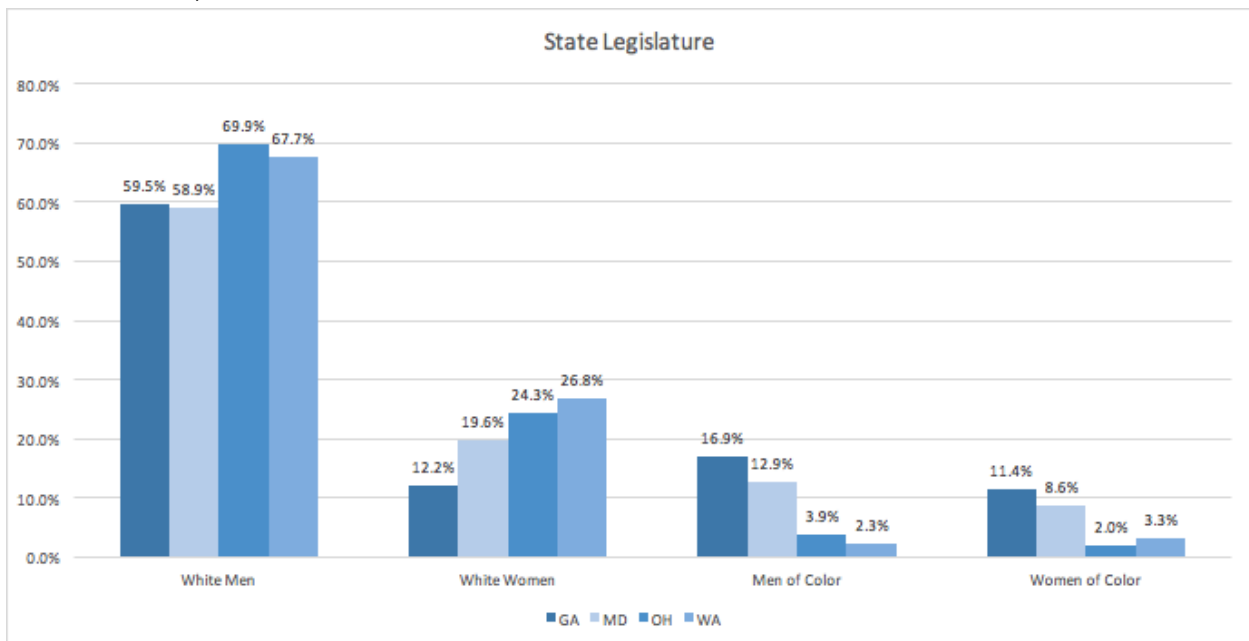
It is important to keep in mind the differences between these states' populations figures -- Georgia and Maryland are 60% and 62% white, compared to Washington and Ohio's 81% and 83% -- when viewing the raw percentages. Georgia and Maryland have slightly higher representation for people of color on the ballot, which makes sense given those states' demographics compared to those of Ohio and Washington. In addition, places with a higher number of counties, such as Ohio (88) or Georgia (159), tend to have more small, rural counties whose officeholders and candidates are reflective of the area's (most often white) populations.



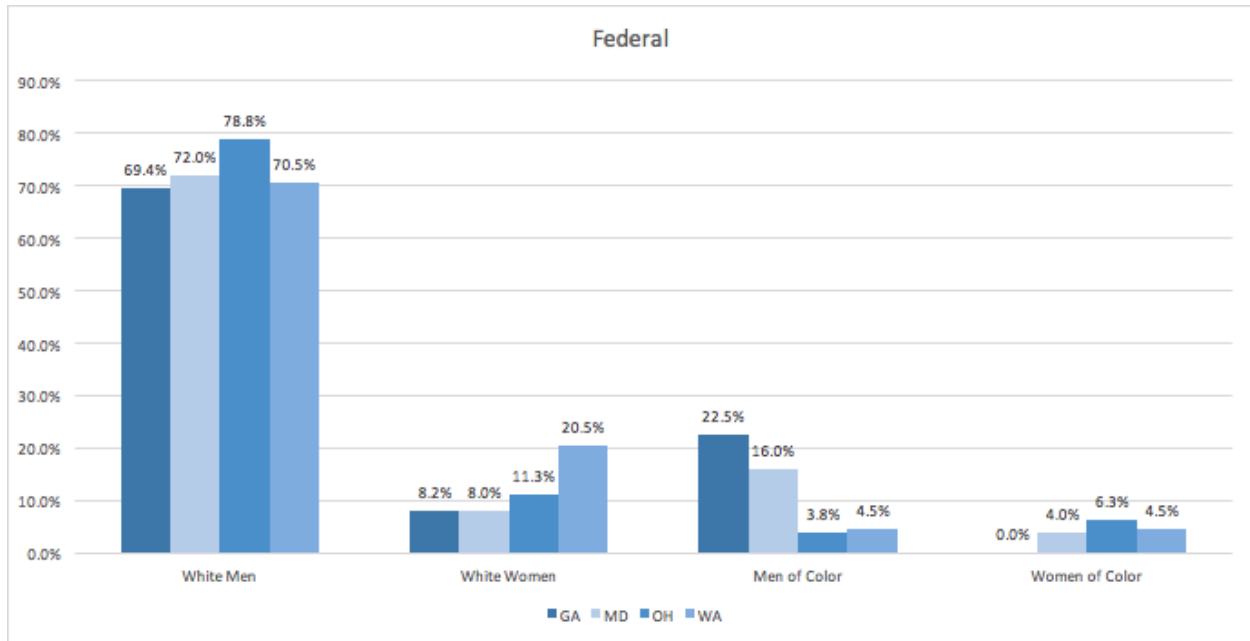
Looking at county and local offices, we can see that while the macro-trends in representation still hold - white men are still dominant, women of color candidates are rare - some more localized trends also occur. In states such as Ohio, which has a large number of counties, many of which are overwhelmingly white, we see that local offices slightly have more white candidates than would be expected. Additionally, local offices in most states are more likely to have women on the ballot than the overall numbers would indicate, but that does not hold universally.



State legislatures are where we start to see a general trend of increased ballot appearances from people of color. Even in Ohio and Washington, a slight but noticeable increase occurs for both men and women of color appearing on the ballot. This tracks with the general trend in elected offices, as well.



Generally, the trend holds that the higher the office level, the fewer women that appear on the ballot. At the federal level we get a stark increase in the number of men running and, though there are some stronger numbers for people of color in states with a significant minority population, a large number of white men in particular.



Unopposed Contests

One of the most surprising things to come out of the dataset was the sheer number of offices for which only one candidate was on the ballot. Though many of these offices may have had competitive primaries, by the time of the (higher turnout) general election, 53% of contests contained a single, unopposed candidate. Interestingly, though the demographics of unopposed contests largely mirror the overall numbers, there were slightly more women running unopposed than would be expected given the larger trends.

Unopposed	Female	Male	Grand Total
Non-White	3.7%	6.5%	10.2%
White	28.9%	60.8%	89.8%
Grand Total	32.7%	67.3%	100.0%

A Note on the Data

As with previous research in this vein, this study used a combination of self-identification, pre-existing research, and voterfile matching to obtain race and gender of candidates. We recognize that in some cases, the voterfile's modeled race may not be the race which the person in question identifies as. In aggregate, testing has confirmed the data's accuracy in identifying gender and distinguishing between white individuals and persons of color. While the data itself includes the race we have assigned each candidate, the numbers presented here will be broken

down as “White” and “Non-White,” as smaller sample sizes make it difficult to present aggregate race-by-race numbers with high confidence.

While we are very confident in the conclusions reached from this study, we do caution further researchers to recognize the limitations of this data for drawing conclusions from small subsets of its population. We intend this to be a living dataset, a starting point for conversation and future research, not an endpoint. As such we welcome those who use this data to [submit any issues or errors that they see](#) so that this dataset can continue to improve.

This dataset matched 85% of all candidates for offices included in this study. In order to ensure that the excluded population was not significantly different than the matched population, a random sample of previously excluded candidates was independently identified and there was no significant difference found between the two populations. In further testing, the race and genders of the excluded population was assigned to follow the random sample’s distribution, and repeated simulations showed that there would be at the most extreme distribution a 1.5% impact on the topline percentages included here.