

WHO RUNS (IN) AMERICA?

A Project of the
Reflective Democracy Campaign

WDN

Who Runs (in) America?

What the ballot tells us about Reflective Democracy

The Challenge

Last year, the **Reflective Democracy Campaign** of the **Women Donors Network (WDN)** released a groundbreaking study showing that political power in America sits disproportionately with white men, who at 31% of the population hold 65% of elected positions. WDN identified a range of structural barriers preventing more women and people of color from holding office, but there was one nagging question that the data couldn't answer: what if more women and people of color aren't in office because the voters don't want them to be?

So we went back to work. Using datasets from the 2012 and 2014 November general elections, we analyzed more than 51,000 candidates by race and gender to find out if American voters have a choice: Does the option exist to elect candidates who look more like the country, and less like the country club?

The Outcome: Both Candidates and Elected Officials are 90% White

Breaking analysis by the Reflective Democracy Campaign shows that Americans *can't* elect more women and people of color into office, because they're not on the ballot. In fact, the imbalanced representation we found in the WhoLeads.Us study of elected officials was almost exactly replicated in the candidate data. From the federal level down to county elections, fewer than 30% of all political candidates are women, and just 10% of candidates are people of color. Meanwhile, women are 51% of the population, and 38% of Americans are people of color.

	All Candidates			Elected Officials			Population		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Non-white	3%	7%	10%	4%	7%	10%	19%	18%	37%
White	24%	66%	90%	25%	65%	90%	32%	31%	63%
Total	27%	73%	100%	29%	71%	100%	51%	49%	100%

Deeper Dives

Bi-Partisan Problem

Our research shows that both major parties have failed to offer voters candidates who reflect the American people. Overall, 96% of candidates running as Republicans are white; so are 82% of Democrats and 90% of Independents. The country, meanwhile is 63% white. Nationwide, the numbers show Democratic candidates only slightly more representative than Republican and Independent candidates:

Candidates	Republican			Democratic			Independent		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Non-white	1%	3%	4%	6%	12%	18%	3%	7%	10%
White	23%	73%	96%	27%	55%	82%	21%	69%	90%
Total	24%	76%	100%	33%	67%	100%	24%	76%	100%

White Males Dominate Federal Offices

The absence of diversity is most acute at the federal level, where white males are 71% of candidates. The proportion of female candidates—especially whites—rises at the state and local levels: white women are 13% of federal candidates, 22% of candidates for state legislature, and 26% of local office candidates.

Level of office	Federal	State	State Legislatures	Local
White males % of all candidates	71%	67%	65%	66%
Non-white candidates	16%	13%	13%	8%
White women candidates	13%	20%	22%	26%

The picture for people of color is notably reversed. People of color constitute 16% of candidates at the federal level and only 8% at the local. The likely explanation is the high number of counties, cities and towns with nearly all-white populations, a phenomenon that also affects significant disparities among states, as seen below.

Entrenched Power: 53% of races are un-opposed; 61% of un-opposed positions are held by white men

A startling factor in the race and gender imbalance among candidates is the power of incumbency, as revealed in the data on unopposed races. Over half of all elections are uncontested, and of candidates running unopposed, 90% are white and 61% are white men.

A Note on Methodology

Working from datasets from the 2012 and 2014 November general elections, this analysis compiled a list of over 60,000 candidates who appeared on ballots at the county level and higher. Of these, we were able to identify the race and gender of over 51,000 candidates. This population of candidates matched by race and gender is the basis of our data.

Based on random sampling and simulation of possible distributions of the remaining unmatched population of candidates by gender and race, we conclude that the most extreme impact of this unmatched population would be 1.5%, meaning that in the most extreme event, our race and gender data would be off by no more than 1.5%.

Women Donors Network is a community of progressive women who contribute to a more just and fair world through collaborative learning and action. Learn more at womendonors.org.

The **Reflective Democracy Campaign** reimagines a political system that engages America's full range of talent and experience. The campaign conducts groundbreaking research, engages the public in crucial dialogue, and makes catalytic investments in leaders and organizations working towards a Reflective Democracy. Learn more about WDN's Reflective Democracy Campaign at WhoLeads.US.