



WHO RUNS ^(IN) AMERICA?

A Project of the
Reflective Democracy Campaign



WDN

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ACCESS TO POWER BLOCKED AT THE BALLOT: 90% OF CANDIDATES ARE WHITE; OVER 70% ARE MALE

As 2016 General Election Approaches, New Research Shows Candidates Reflect the Country Club more than the Country

San Francisco, CA – October 29, 2015—The *Who Runs (in) America?* Report released today by the Reflective Democracy Campaign of the Women Donors Network (WDN) shows that white men dominate ballots nationwide, representing two of every three names appearing on the ballot in 2012 and 2014 from the federal level down to counties. Overall, 90% of candidates are white, 73% are men, and 66% are white men.

The demographics of candidates almost exactly match the demographics of those who hold elected office, as demonstrated by the Reflective Democracy Campaign's groundbreaking study, *Who Leads Us?*, released last fall. That research revealed that of the 42,000 people who hold office from the federal down to the county level, 90% are white, 71% are men, and 65% are white men.

This research reveals that voters are presented with an extraordinarily narrow range of choices in the voting booth. "The stark imbalance between the demographics of the American people and their elected officials will not change until voters have the opportunity to choose among candidates who reflect their communities," said Donna Hall, CEO of the Women Donors Network. "Women are half the population and people of color are almost 40%, and it's time the people on our ballots reflect that."

The new study, analyzing more than 51,000 candidates running in nearly 38,000 elections in 2012 and 2014, shows that this is a bipartisan problem. Overall, 96% of candidates running as Republicans are white; so are 82% of Democrats and 90% of Independents. Women are 24% of Republican candidates and 33% of Democrats.

"This data shows that the problem is not that women and people of color candidates aren't winning—in fact, they're winning at the same rates as men and white candidates," observed Brenda Choresi Carter, Director of the Reflective Democracy Campaign. "The problem is that the demographics of our office holders are set when our ballots are printed." The political system selects for people who can afford not to hold a regular, full-time job; people who are connected to political networks; and people who aren't perceived as "risky" by the political parties, donors, and other gatekeepers who select candidates.

The power of incumbency also plays a major role: the study reveals that 53% of all elections are uncontested, and that 90% of unopposed candidates are white, and 61% are white men.

Alongside this analysis of the widespread exclusion of women and people of color from political candidacy, the Reflective Democracy Campaign is also working to develop solutions, awarding \$425,000 in grants to six Reflective Democracy Innovators tackling the structural barriers that perpetuate this imbalance. These Reflective Democracy Innovators include Jessica Byrd, recognized as one of the 12 New Faces of Black Leadership by TIME magazine and the January 2015 Woman to Watch by *Essence* magazine; and Gloria Totten and the Public Leadership Institute, the 501c3 sister organization of Progressive Majority, the nation's most comprehensive candidate recruitment, training, and political support operation.

"We're taking our cues from the voters," WDN CEO Donna Hall explained. In a national survey by the Campaign last year, an overwhelming majority of voters, regardless of party identification, supported measures to bring more women and people of color into elected office. Most voters surveyed said that "an old boys' club" best described our current elected officials — a far cry from "the best and the brightest," the phrase most voters said *should* describe our elected officials.

At WhoLeads.Us/candidates, the Campaign presents a full array of resources and tools to engage the public and equip activists and advocates. With "Schoolhouse Rock" clarity, the campaign's video and infographics present the research findings and describe how the system perpetuates the status quo. Presentation of the research includes an Executive Summary of *Who Runs (in) America?*, the full research report including state-by-state breakdowns of candidates, and access to the full data set.

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Women Donors Network is a community of progressive women philanthropists 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 at WhoLeads.Us/candidates.