

Who Leads Us? Data Tells the Story



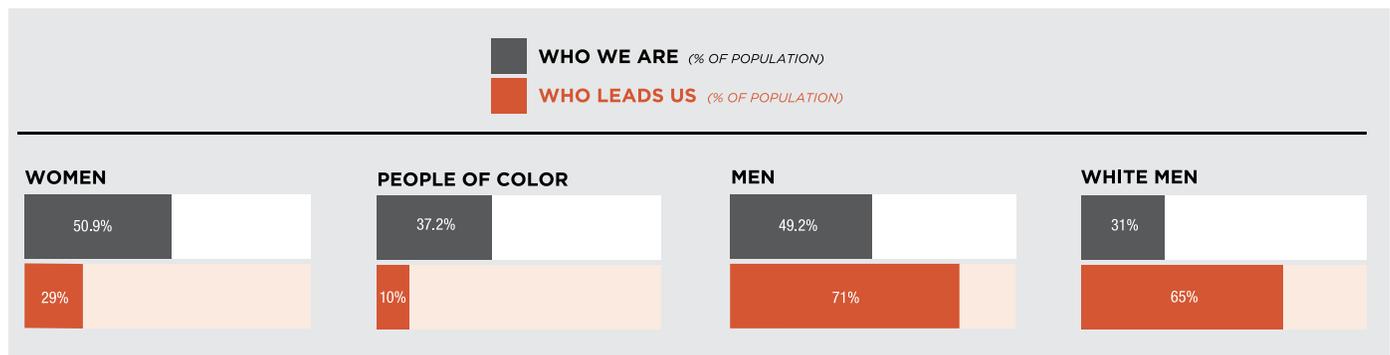
The Reflective Democracy Campaign's groundbreaking research on the race and gender of elected officials

A crucial first step toward fixing any problem is understanding it. In 2014, our *Who Leads Us?* report presented the first comprehensive analysis of the race and gender of elected officials from the federal down to the county level. Next, we conducted the same analysis of elected prosecutors in *Justice for All?*, and of candidates in the 2012 and 2014 elections in *Who Runs (in) America?*. Our research findings have grabbed headlines from coast to coast, and the data itself, free and publicly available, has served as a vital tool for academics, activists and advocates.

WHO LEADS US?

Released in October 2014, *Who Leads Us?* analyzed the race and gender of the 42,000 people who hold office at the county level and higher nationwide as of July 2014. At all levels, we found that white men dominate political representation:

- 90% of officeholders are white, compared to only 63% of the population.
- Men hold 71% of elected offices, even though they are just 49% of the population.
- White men hold 65% of elected seats, although they are only 31% of the population.



While there was some variation by level of office -- people of color are slightly better represented in state legislatures and women do better at the county level -- no group other than white men comes close to being represented at their population level.

WOMEN		MEN		PEOPLE OF COLOR		WHITE	
OFFICE LEVEL		OFFICE LEVEL		OFFICE LEVEL		OFFICE LEVEL	
FEDERAL	19%	FEDERAL	81%	FEDERAL	17%	FEDERAL	83%
STATEWIDE	21%	STATEWIDE	71%	STATEWIDE	7%	STATEWIDE	93%
STATE LEGISLATURE	25%	STATE LEGISLATURE	75%	STATE LEGISLATURE	15%	STATE LEGISLATURE	85%
COUNTY	30%	COUNTY	70%	COUNTY	9%	COUNTY	91%
GRAND TOTAL	29%	GRAND TOTAL	71%	GRAND TOTAL	10%	GRAND TOTAL	90%

NATIONAL REPRESENTATION INDEX

We applied this data to create the National Representation Index, which ranks all 50 states and DC by how much political power white men hold compared to other groups. Weighted by level of office, the Index showed that white men have on average four times (4X) the political power of all other groups. The analysis of states with more diverse populations revealed some surprises, with both “blue” New York (44th, 6X) and “red” Georgia (51st, 9.6X) at the bottom of the Index.



Justice For All?

*Justice For All*² examined the 2,437 prosecutors elected to office across the nation as of the summer of 2014. We found that 95% of elected prosecutors were white and 79% were white men. Only 1% of elected prosecutors were women of color.



Beyond the core findings, a deeper analysis of the research revealed these significant facts:

- Over half of states, including Illinois, had no elected black prosecutors.
- Outside of Virginia and Mississippi, only 1% of elected prosecutors are black.
- Latinos are 17% of the population but only 1.7% of elected prosecutors.

Research by Ronald Wright at the Wake University School of Law has found that 85% of prosecutors run unopposed¹. Our data reveals that the power of incumbency creates not only unchecked power in these offices, but perpetuates a concentration of power in the hands of one demographic group.

Who Runs (in) America?



Using datasets from the 2012 and 2014 November general elections, we analyzed more than 51,000 candidates by race and gender—again looking at all elected offices at the county level and higher—to find out if American voters have a choice: Is there an option to elect candidates who look more like the country, and less like the country club? *Who Runs (in) America?* showed that Americans can’t elect more women and people of color into office, because they’re not on the ballot. In fact, the skewed representation we found in 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 people of color are 38%.

ALL CANDIDATES				ALL CANDIDATES				ALL CANDIDATES			
	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%		

¹http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/osjcl/Articles/Volume6_2/Wright-FinalPDF.pdf

Our research shows that both major parties fail to nominate candidates who reflect the American people. Overall, 96% of candidates running as Republicans are white; so are 82% of Democrats and 90% of independents. Nationwide, Democratic candidates are only slightly more representative than Republicans and independents:

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%

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.

Methodology

Our partner in this research has been the Center for Technology & Civic Life, which works to modernize engagement between the American people and their government through accessible data and technology. They compiled our race and gender information in three ways:

- **Existing Research.** In cases where an officeholder had previously self-identified by race or gender through a state- or third party-administered survey, this information was integrated into our analysis.
- **Email/Phone Surveys.** In instances where contact information for the elected officials was available, we administered a survey which asked the officials to self-identify by race and gender.
- **Voter File Matching.** When self-identifying information was unavailable, we worked with TargetSmart Communications to match publicly available information about elected officials from campaign finance and filing documents with state records of registered voters. TargetSmart then provided the race and gender information available on their enhanced version of the file. In states that do not solicit race information on their voter registration form, a likely race and gender is modeled for each voter based on a proprietary mix of geographic, demographic, and other factors. In a sample of nearly a thousand officials for which both self-identified and modeled race were available, the race model was accurate 95% of the time. (The gender model was accurate 99% of the time in a similarly sized sample.) While voter file matching may introduce some errors at the individual level, we are very confident in the aggregated numbers.

ELECTED PROSECUTOR DATA - VARIABILITY BY STATE

The number of jurisdictions that elect prosecutors varies greatly by state. Some have no elected prosecutors or just a State Attorney General. Others have dozens of elected prosecutor positions. While some states also have a number of prosecutors who are appointed, we focused entirely on the positions that are elected directly and are therefore presumed to be accountable to the people they represent.

CANDIDATE DATA – 1.5% MARGIN OF ERROR

The *Who Runs (in) America?* research used datasets from the 2012 and 2014 November general elections, compiling 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%.

There's More to Learn

While our research has provided a crucial baseline, we now know there is more to learn. Here are just a few of the questions waiting to be explored:

- **Sectors:** Are boards of education more likely to be gender-balanced? How racially representative is the justice system? How reflective are positions like Treasurer, Secretary of State, Registrar and Assessor?
- **Geography:** Are elected officials more reflective in urban or rural communities? Are there noteworthy trends by state or region? Do municipal or county-level elections have more reflective outcomes than statewide elections?
- **Demographics:** How non-white does a community have to be before non-white candidates succeed? Are non-white communities more or less likely to elect women?
- **Career trajectories:** How do reflective candidates succeed as they attempt different levels of office? Are reflective candidates able to run and fail, and run again?
- **Timing of elections and voter turnout:** Do reflective outcomes vary in off-year elections versus primaries or national elections? What is the impact of voter turnout?
- **Voting systems and structures:** What is the impact of district elections vs. at-large voting? Do innovations like ranked-choice voting make a difference? Is there a correlation to voter registration policies and the success of reflective candidates?

Use our Data

The campaign's data sets are free and available for academics, activists and advocates. [Go to WhoLeads.Us to download.](#)



The Reflective Democracy Campaign, a project of the Women Donors Network, 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.

To promote solutions, the campaign invests in our Reflective Democracy Innovators: leaders and organizations tackling the barriers to Reflective Democracy. [Learn more at WhoLeads.Us.](#)

WOMEN DONORS NETWORK is a community with a purpose – together they connect, learn and take action to further a shared vision of a more just, equitable and sustainable world. WDN programs are designed to ignite change, providing donors with opportunities to support progressive movement-building as we deepen our knowledge, work in partnership with allies, and engage in nimble and strategic grant making. [Learn more at womendonors.org.](#)