

WOMEN & ELECTED OFFICE

Barriers & Pathways

Overview

Following the 2016 election of President Trump, there has been an upswing in women seeking political office. Currently women in the U.S only hold 19.4% of Congressional Seats and 10% of Governorships. Worse, women of color hold only 7% of Congressional Seats and only 2% of Governorships. This begs the question: why have so few women been elected to higher office? Below, we illustrate the importance of representation, the challenges faced by women seeking office, and how individuals can best support progressive women entering political spaces.

Why Does Women's Representation Matter?

"If you aren't at the table, you are on the menu."

When women do not hold political power, our interests are not part of the decision making process. Women bring unique and valuable perspectives and experiences to the legislative process, promoting laws that create equitable systems for women and families. As U.S. Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) said at the Women's March: "All issues are women's issues. It's important we don't relegate women to just one set of issues as though every issue isn't a women's issue." Progressive women see politics as a way to support and serve underrepresented communities and are more likely to focus on so-called "women's issues" like social policy.



The photo above shows a group of officials discussing the Affordable Care Act repeal--this all male group underscores the importance of women's representation.

The Gender Gap In Political Ambition

According to Pew Research Center, about two-thirds of Americans say it is easier for men than women to get elected to high political offices. This perception of women in leadership leads to the **Gender Gap in Political Ambition**. From a young age, women are less likely than men to receive encouragement to run for office. Additionally, women are less likely than men to think they are qualified candidates. **On average women have to be asked seven times to consider running for an elected position.**

Challenges in Seeking Higher Office

In a report released by Political Parity, fundraising was listed as the largest hurdle to women running for higher office. Their concerns weren't about asking for money. Instead, the difficulty women pointed to **was not being connected to the right networks to successfully fund raise.**

As women consider entering the political sphere, networks, fundraising, and political information are consistently controlled by male-dominated spaces. Pipelines and role models primarily exist for men with political ambition: this creates a cycle in which women do not see themselves reflected in political leadership, thus do not pursue political roles.

2017 Elections: A Win for Women

The 2017 Elections were a win for progressive feminist candidates, especially in Virginia! The election marked many firsts for the Virginia House of Delegates including electing the first openly transgender delegate Danica Roem. Read more about this historic election from the Center for American Women and Politics [here!](#)

This success indicates how women have mobilized to create change in elected office and foreshadows good news for 2018!

How Can You Support Progressive Women Running for Office?

- 1. Run for office yourself!**
- 2. Ask a progressive woman that you see potential in to run for office... then ask her again.**
- 3. Volunteer and donate to progressive women candidates!**
- 4. Think locally: the political pipeline starts locally, support progressive women candidates in your community.**
- 5. Pass along information, trainings and resources:**



Emerge America

Offers a “training program providing aspiring female leaders with cutting-edge tools and training to run for elected office and elevate themselves in our political system.”

Running Start

“By educating young women and girls about the importance of politics, and imbuing them with the skills they need to be leaders, we give women the running start they need to achieve greater political power.”