

Running for a Change: Girls and Politics Pulse Poll

October 2014

The Girl Scout Research Institute conducted a “pulse poll” with a national sample* of 1,088 teen and tween girls ages 11–17 in the U.S. to determine their interest in, attitude toward, and perception of politics. The sample is matched demographically to the U.S. Census distribution of girls in this age range. This online poll fielded in September 2014.

The research shows that girls have interest in politics and have had an array of political and civic engagement experiences both in and out of school. However, their interest and experience doesn’t add up to future political career intent. Girls are well aware of the stereotypes that exist for females and political careers, especially as perpetuated by the media, and they believe that women are quite capable of pursuing political careers. Girls call for more guidance, opportunities, and general support to further their political interests and capabilities.

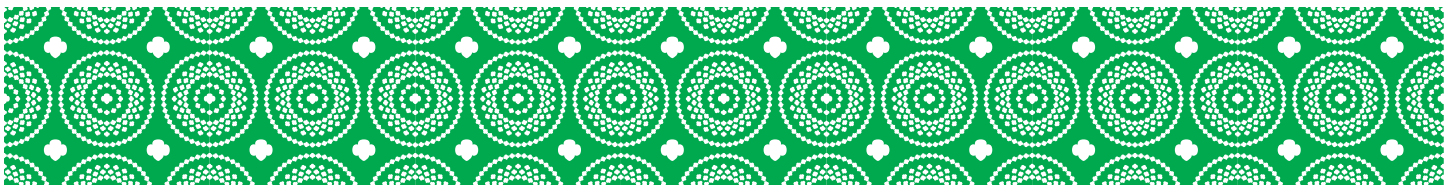
Finding 1: Girls are interested in politics.

- Our study found that an impressive **67 percent of girls are interested in politics**. More than one in five (22%) are very interested and just less than half (45%) of girls are somewhat interested in politics.
- More than a third (37%) of girls are interested in becoming a politician. One in ten girls (9%) are very interested, and more than a quarter of girls (28%) are somewhat interested in becoming a politician.
- The most common motivations behind becoming a politician are the desire to make a difference in the world (78%) and the desire to help people (76%).

Finding 2: Girls have experience in political, civic engagement, and leadership activities.

More than 9 in 10 girls (93%) have been engaged in some kind of political, civic engagement, or leadership activity in school or out of school. The most popular activities center around causes and campaigns that girls care about. The least popular activity is running for student government.

- A vast majority (83%) of girls have participated in a cause, campaign, or organization they believe in, including fundraisers (65%) and cause-, campaign-, or organization-based volunteer work (57%).
- Seventy-nine percent of girls have some form of voting experience, including voting for something or someone themselves (56%) and accompanying a parent to vote (53%).
- Girls have also had a number of in-school and out-of-school opportunities for this kind of activity, including participating in a classroom or school debate (64%), participating in community service (64%), joining a youth leadership program (55%), mentoring others (44%), and running for student council or government (28%).



Finding 3: Despite their promising interest and experience, girls don't see politics as a primary career option for their futures.

- Eighty-two percent of girls acknowledge that serving in a political capacity is not a common goal for girls their age. When asked to choose, 61 percent say they would rather be a movie star than president of the United States.
- A high proportion of girls (92%) believe “there are other ways for me to make a difference in the world besides becoming a politician.”

Finding 4: Girls are well aware that politics is “a man’s world.”

- The majority (74%) of girls agree that “if I went into a career in politics, I’d have to work harder than a man to be taken seriously.”
- Only 32 percent of girls believe that society encourages women to pursue careers as politicians.
- The majority of girls believe that men are more likely than women to be encouraged to pursue a career in politics and run for office, win an election, and be taken seriously as a politician.

Finding 5: Girls see male and female politicians as equally capable, but notice how the media depicts female politicians very negatively.

- Female and male politicians are seen by girls as equally capable (81%), intelligent (80%), confident (72%), brave (71%), resilient (71%), competent as a leader (71%), likely to make a difference in the world (69%), visionary (66%), and honest/trustworthy (60%).
- However, when thinking about how the media depicts female politicians, the story changes. Girls think the media depicts female politicians, compared to male politicians, as **more** motivated by their emotions (62%), and **less** capable (12%), intelligent (14%), confident (12%), brave (17%), resilient (16%), competent as a leader (12%), likely to make a difference in the world (18%), visionary (21%), and honest/trustworthy (31%).

Finding 6: But girls don't want to count themselves out. They feel like they have what it takes to have a political career.

- Eighty-four percent of girls say “I am smart enough to have a career in politics.”
- Only 17 percent of girls agree with the statement “men make better politicians than women.”

Finding 7: Girls are calling for more support from society, the media, and the adults in their lives, if they are to start seriously considering and pursuing politics in the coming years.

- Girls need more teacher support, as just 38 percent of girls say their teachers have encouraged them to pursue politics.
- Sixty-five percent of girls feel more mentoring for girls and young women from current politicians would encourage more girls to pursue a career in politics.
- Fifty-seven percent of girls feel more after-school programs for girls to gain experience in community work and/or politics would encourage more girls to pursue a career in politics.
- Sixty-five percent of girls feel more positive stories about female politicians in the media would encourage more girls to pursue a career in politics.

*The national sample consists of Girl Scouts and non-Girl Scouts. Racial/ethnic breakdown is as follows: 62% White, 19% Hispanic, 18% African American, 7% Asian, and 2% “Other”.

