Women have been consistently underrepresented in government, but now, with most women and girls feeling disconnected and absent from the decision-making that affects their everyday lives, we risk invisibility. Our voices are needed at the table now more than ever, but if we don't drastically rethink how we get there, it will take close to 300 years before we achieve full gender equality.

Women are 51% of the population yet hold less than a third of all elected offices and, shockingly, recent studies show over 100M women in the U.S. cannot even imagine themselves in elected roles. Our current state of the union isn't helping. Historically, the U.S. has seen deep turmoil before, but we're in unprecedented times as we crawl out of a pandemic amid increasing economic and social struggles and witness the brutal disconnect between government policy and public opinion.

The truth is, despite noteworthy gains for representation in the U.S. and a growing network of over 40,0000 women exploring the starting line in the She Should Run Community, we are missing the mark as a field. Our research shows that conventional wisdom on well-intentioned messaging aimed at pulling women into the political process is not reaching a majority of women who can and should be running for office.
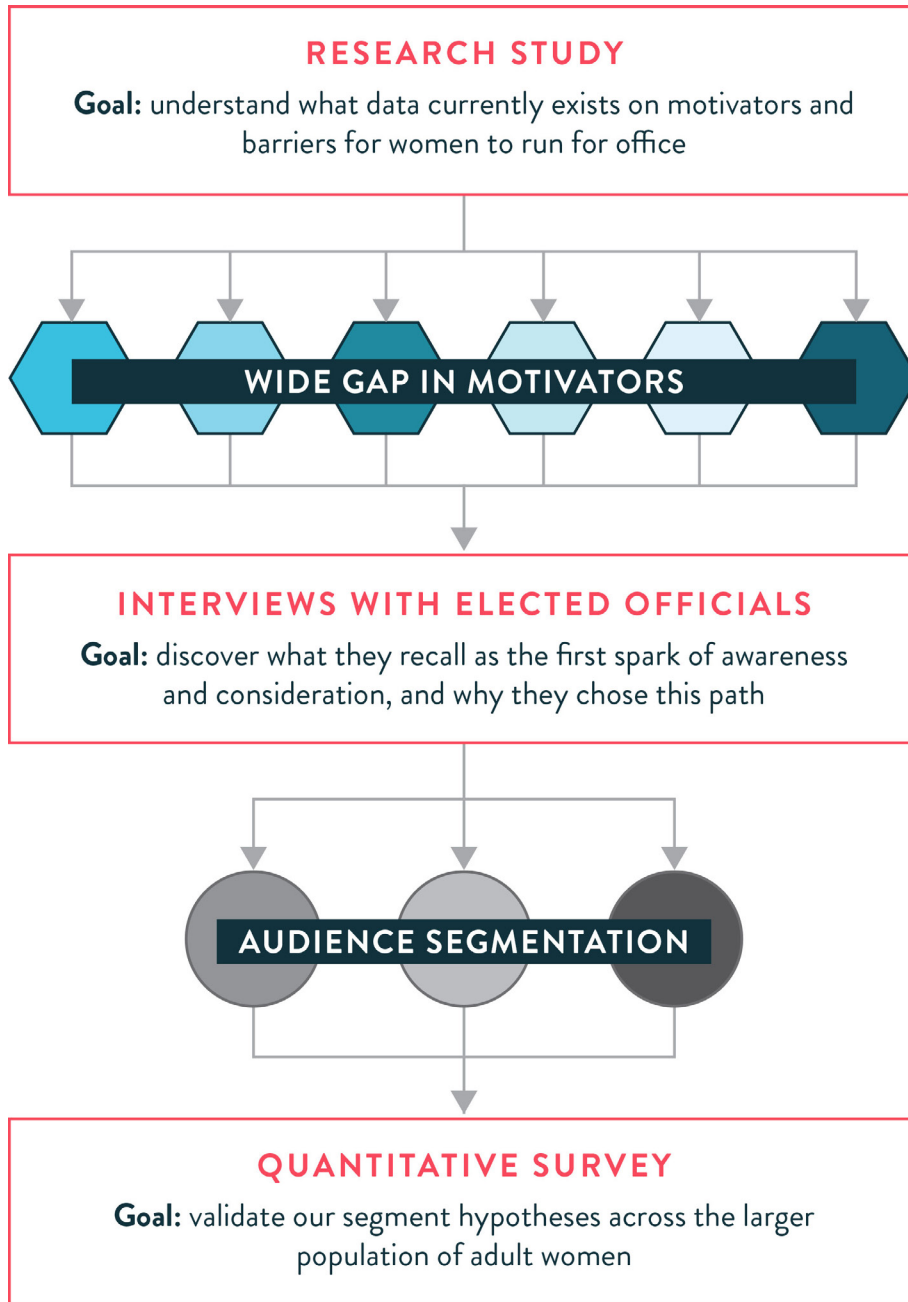
We've spent the last decade working at the starting line of women's representation, designing programs to reach and inspire women from all walks of life to consider elected leadership well before their name might end up on a ballot; and yet, despite tremendous efforts and thoughtful programming from us and our peers, there are still millions of women we are not currently reaching.

There are reasons to be hopeful, however. Gen Z is the most diverse generation in U.S. history; their involvement in politics is more driven by specific issues than partisanship, and voter turnout among Gen Z women in particular has been steadily increasing. It is in this hope for a brighter future that She Should Run's mission flourishes.

This research was a wake-up call and a timely reminder that the stakes of this crisis have never been higher. We must push outside the echo chamber, think much bigger, and commit to targeted strategies that embrace the complexities of women today. If we're going to see women's voices and perspectives fully represented in our lifetime, we need to drastically scale the number and diversity of women we reach in the near term.

Methodology

In order to reach women who aren't currently thinking of their role in elected leadership, we know we need to meet them where they are. With most existing research focused on the barriers women face to elected office, She Should Run commissioned a market research study to uncover the motivators that can move a woman towards elected leadership, filling an essential gap in current field analysis.

RESEARCH STUDY

Goal: understand what data currently exists on motivators and barriers for women to run for office

WIDE GAP IN MOTIVATORS

INTERVIEWS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Goal: discover what they recall as the first spark of awareness and consideration, and why they chose this path

AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

Goal: validate our segment hypotheses across the larger population of adult women

Key Findings

Every woman has a unique journey leading up to a decision to run, influenced by her specific set of motivators and barriers, life experiences, and interactions within her ecosystem. However, our research revealed that there are three distinct patterns in what motivates women to run for office, captured through personas.

Naomi Newcomer
7.8% of adult women in the US = 8.5M

Sierra Service-Oriented
14.6% of adult women in the US = 15.9M

Carla Childhood Dreamer
2.5% of adult women in the US = 2.75M

Naomi sees a problem. She is primarily motivated by her anger and frustrations surrounding key social issues that continue to impact her and her community adversely. She may or may not have historical experience in the political sphere, but she is motivated by the support she receives from her local community members.

Key Motivators: Anger around a social issue; frustration with politicians; support from community members

Sierra sees potential. She is primarily motivated by her sense of duty to her community. She has a history of volunteer and community impact work, which has led her to consider pursuing leadership positions that enable her to further her ability to enact change around the causes she cares about.

*Key Motivators: Next step to help her causes; duty to her community, support from causes, community*

Carla feels it's in her blood. She is primarily motivated by personal ambition, approval, and creating a legacy. She grew up around politics, so she is more resourced and ready than most candidates.

Key Motivators: Creating a legacy; seeking approval and acceptance; personal ambition

TOTAL ADDRESSABLE MARKET
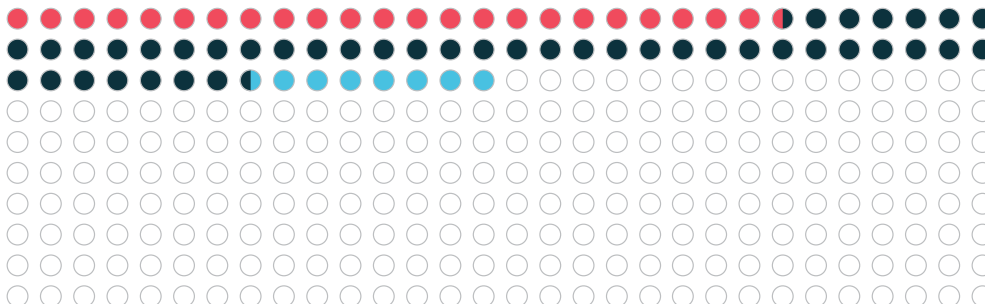
- NAOMI NEWCOMER
- SIERRA SERVICE-ORIENTED
- CARLA CHILDHOOD DREAMER
- ADULT WOMEN (OVER 18) IN THE US TODAY

Women Are Not A Monolith

While common motivators were extrapolated through personas (above), our research confirmed what we already know: women are not monolithic. Each has an associated archetypal journey that reveals what it takes for them to determine if they want to run for office, based on their own lived experiences. These journeys can be influenced by the right support at the right time.

Moreover, there are statistically significant differences between ethnic groups and demographics represented in our survey data, underscoring the critical importance of applying customized outreach strategies that meet women where they are, based on their unique lived experiences, attributes, and motivations.

BLACK / AFRICAN AMERICAN

- 81% of Black women considering a run have previously worked on a campaign (either volunteer or staff). This is significantly higher than other groups.
- Black women considering a run have been encouraged far more than other groups. In fact, 31% of those considering a run said they had been encouraged over 10 times!
- More often than other groups, Black women consider running to serve their communities.

Possible Action: Develop outreach strategies to reach women who align with the Sierra Service persona in geographies with large Black/African American populations.

HISPANIC / LATINA

- On average, feelings toward politics are more negative.
- When Hispanic women consider running for office, they feel significantly more "threatened" and "stressed" than all other groups.
- In response to conflict, substantially more Hispanic women said their first instinct is to fight for their side, though they tend not to protest (either in person or on social media).

Possible Action: Develop outreach strategies to reach women who align with the Naomi Newcomer persona in communities with large numbers of Hispanic/Latina women. Ensure civic education is accessible and widely available to support the entry of Latina women into the political sphere.

NATIVE AMERICAN

- On average, feelings toward politics are more positive.
- Far more likely to take a stand for a cause they care about than other groups.
- More likely than any other group to describe themselves as a "leader."
- Of Native Americans who have considered a run for office, 67% have a specific role in mind (more than any other group).

Possible Action: Develop outreach strategies to reach Native American women who align with the Sierra Service-Oriented persona, given strong ties to their community and existing leadership attributes.

ASIAN / PACIFIC ISLANDER

- On average, feelings toward politics are more negative.
- When asked if they had ever considered a run, significantly more Asian or Pacific Islander women (63%) said they had never really considered it.
- When Asian women take a stand, it's mostly for a cause (more so than most groups, though less so than Native American women).
- Asian women rely on encouragement more from friends and less from people in the community.

Possible Action: Develop outreach strategies to reach Asian or Pacific Islander women who align with the Naomi Newcomer persona, given negative feelings towards politics but strong desires to stand up for causes they care about. Develop tool(s) to help friends and community members encourage women in their lives to consider elected leadership.

MIDDLE EASTERN / NORTH AFRICAN

- Most likely to donate money to support a cause.
- More than other groups, Middle Eastern/North African participants become involved in their community because they feel dissatisfied with local leadership, to make the world better for family/kids, and to leave a legacy.
- Relied on former teachers/professors for encouragement more than any other group.

Possible Action: Develop outreach strategies to reach Middle Eastern / North African women who align with the Naomi Newcomer and/or the Carla the Dreamer persona, given negative feelings towards politics but desire to leave a legacy for family and friends. Develop tool(s) to help teachers and others in the education space encourage women in their lives to consider elected leadership.

GEN Z

Recent research has collectively shown that younger generations view major societal issues through an intersectional lens. Complex challenges like gender equity are considered holistically, rather than in issue-specific silos. We also know Gen Z women exist across all ethnicities, demographics, and even our research-identified personas. In general, Gen Z prefers to seek change through grassroots participation in their particular causes over politics. They have extremely low levels of public trust and expectations for politicians.

Gen Z Motivators:

- Improving the world for their generation
- Taking action over complaining
- Disdain for chaotic, negative politics

Notable Points:

- Gen Z is the most diverse generation in U.S. history (30% LGBTQ, 33% Black, 15% Hispanic).
- 98% of teens own a smartphone.
- Gen Z concentrates more on specific issues than political parties or partisan dynamics.

Possible Action: Develop outreach strategies to reach Gen Z women who align with the Naomi Newcomer persona in communities with large numbers of Hispanic/Latina, Black, and LGBTQ women. Give particular emphasis to marketing strategies that reach women who care about issues prevalent in current events.

WHAT COMES NEXT

University of Virginia Professor Jennifer Lawless' recent research confirmed suspicions in the field that women today are just as unlikely as they were 20 years ago to express interest in running for office. To see equal representation in our lifetime, we need to drastically rethink how we're approaching this work to see more women in elected positions.

Prior to our research, the entire field of women's representation has been focused on the woman who is already committed to running for office, from the strategies and messages used to reach her, to the money that supports her. Unfortunately, that messaging and those resources do not resonate with the millions of women not in that headspace. As demonstrated in our personas, Carla the Childhood Dreamer represents the smallest market potential for future women leaders yet these are the women currently receiving most of the motivation and encouragement to run for office.

Our research revealed two key learnings that will fuel the next phase of program from She Should Run:

1. Women are not monolithic and therefore there is no one message that resonates. However, the research uncovered that what **can and does motivate women is the resounding support and encouragement from others**, namely those closest to the woman in question (faith leaders, friends, family, and other electeds in some cases).

2. Our prioritization market calculations revealed that focusing on women driven by a **Problem** or the **Potential** she sees in her community will yield the greatest return on investment of time and resources.