WOMEN

The Women's Leadership Gap

Women's Leadership by the Numbers

By Judith Warner and Danielle Corley | Posted on May 21, 2017, 11:59 pm

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Then-Rep. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) speaks in Chicago, March 15, 2016.

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See also: "[Opening the Gates](#)" by Judith Warner

Women make up a majority of the U.S. population

Women are 50.8 percent of the U.S. population.[1]

- They earn almost 60 percent of undergraduate degrees and 60 percent of all master's degrees.[2]

- They earn 47 percent of all law degrees and 48 percent of all medical degrees.[3]

- They earn 38 percent of MBAs and 48 percent of specialized master's degrees.[4]

- They account for 47 percent of the U.S. labor force[5] and 49 percent of the college-educated workforce.[6]

And yet …

Although they hold almost 52 percent of all professional-level jobs,[7] American women lag substantially behind men when it comes to their representation in leadership positions:

- While they are 44 percent of the overall S&P 500 labor force and 36 percent of first- or mid-level officials and managers in those companies, they are only 25 percent of executive- and senior-level officials and managers, hold only 20 percent of board seats, and are only 6 percent of CEOs.[8]

- At S&P 500 companies in the financial services industry, they make up 54 percent of the labor force but are only 29 percent of executive- and senior-level managers and 2 percent of CEOs.[9]

- In the legal field, they are 45 percent of associates but only 22 percent of partners and 18 percent of equity partners.[10]

- In medicine, they comprise 37 percent of all physicians and surgeons[11] but only 16 percent of permanent medical school deans.[12]

- In academia, they are only 31 percent of full professors and 27 percent of college presidents.[13]

- They were only 6 percent of partners in venture capital firms in 2013—down from 10 percent in 1999.[14]

- In 2014, women were just 20 percent of executives, senior officers, and management in U.S. high-tech industries.[15] As recently as 2016, 43 percent of the 150 highest-earning public companies in Silicon Valley had no female executive officers at all.[16]

Furthermore …

Women's on-screen image is still created, overwhelmingly, by men:

- Women accounted for just 17 percent of all the directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors who worked on the top-grossing 250 domestic films of 2016.[17]

- Women were just 26 percent of all off-screen talent on broadcast networks, cable, and streaming programs during the 2015-16 season.[18]

- However, when there are more women behind the camera or at the editor's desk, the representation of women onscreen is better: Films written or directed by women consistently feature a higher percentage of female characters with speaking roles.[19]

A stalled revolution

The last decades of the 20th century brought considerable progress in women's professional advancement in the United States. The gender wage gap narrowed, sex segregation in most professions greatly declined, and the percentage of women climbing the management ranks steadily rose. Yet, the progress has been uneven and is slowing—there are significant racial and ethnic differences in terms of women's success in moving into the top-level jobs, and overall, women continue to fall far short of matching the success of their male counterparts in breaking into the top jobs.

Although the rapid rate of change of the 1970s and 1980s began to slow in the 1990s and 2000s, as

the narrowing of the gender wage gap stalled and the percentage of women in management jobs stagnated,[20] a notable increase in women's representation in very top positions did continue:

- In 1980, there were no women in the top executive ranks of the Fortune 100; by 2001, 11 percent of those corporate leaders were women.[21]

- Women's share of board seats in S&P 1500 companies increased 7.2 percentage points, or 94 percent, from 1997 to 2009, and their share of top executive positions increased 2.8 percentage points, or 86 percent. The share of companies with female CEOs increased more than sixfold.[22]

In recent years, however, the percentage of women in top management positions and on corporate boards has stalled:[23]

- As recently as 2011, women's presence in top management positions in S&P 1500 companies was less than 9 percent.[24]

- As of 2016, women hold just 18 percent of S&P 1500 board seats.[25]

- They are just 25 percent of executive and senior officials and managers, 9.5 percent of top earners, and 6 percent of CEOs in S&P 500 companies.[26]

The numbers have become even more dire for women of color, with very few moving into these top-level opportunities and a number of very high-impact departures in recent years.

Women of color face an even wider gap

The representation of women of color in corporate leadership roles is worse still. Women of color were 38 percent of the nation's female population and 20 percent of the entire U.S. population in 2015.[27] In 2015, they made up 35 percent of the female labor force, 16 percent of the total labor force,[28] and 16.5 percent of workers in S&P 500 companies.[29]

And yet …

- Women of color were only 3.9 percent of executive- or senior-level officials and managers and 0.4 percent of CEOs in those companies in 2015.[30]

- In 2017, after the departure of Ursula Burns as CEO of Xerox Corp., there were no African

American women heading Fortune 500 companies.[31]

- As recently as 2013, more than two-thirds of Fortune 500 companies had no women of color as board directors at all.[32]

How does the United States measure up to other countries?

Very unevenly.

The United States ranks first in women's educational attainment on the World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Gap Index of 144 countries. But it ranks 26th in women's economic participation and opportunity and 73rd in women's political empowerment.[33]

In fact, in the public sector—and in the percentage of female legislators in particular—the United States lags far behind many countries:

- The world average for the share of women in the lower houses of national parliaments is 23.4 percent—slightly above the 19.3 percent in the U.S. House of Representatives.[34]

- At the current rate of change, it will take until 2117 for women to reach parity with men in the U.S. Congress.[35]

U.S. women in politics: Much promise, less change

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the percentage of women running for office increased steadily, culminating in the so-called Year of the Woman in 1992, when the number of women in the U.S. Senate suddenly doubled—from two to four—and the number of women in Congress increased from 28 to 47.[36]

In more recent election cycles, however, the percentage of female candidates has essentially plateaued.[37] In the decade leading up to 2012, the number of women elected to Congress remained basically flat, and the number of women in state legislatures actually decreased.[38]

2012 was considered a watershed election year for women in American politics. A series of historic wins put an end to all-male state legislatures;[39] New Hampshire sent an all-female delegation to Congress;[40] and the number of women of color in the U.S. House of Representatives hit a record

high of 28.[41] In the 2014 midterm elections, the number of women in Congress finally reached triple digits: 104.[42]

While the total number of seats women hold in the current Congress remained unchanged from 2014—women lost one seat in the House while gaining one in the Senate—2016 brought major breakthroughs for women of color: [43]

- Nine new women of color were elected to Congress, bringing the total number of women of color in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate to 38—the highest level in U.S. history.[44]

- Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) became the first Latina member of the U.S. Senate and the first female senator from Nevada.[45]

- Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) became the first Indian American U.S. senator and the second-ever African American female senator.[46]

- Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), the first military veteran elected to the U.S. Senate as a Democrat, became the first Thai American and second Asian American woman senator.[47]

- Rep. Stephanie Murphy (D-FL) became the first Vietnamese American woman elected to Congress.

- Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) became the first Indian American woman elected to the House of Representatives.[48]

- Minneapolis State Rep. Ilhan Omar (D) became the first Somali American Muslim woman legislator in U.S. history.[49]

In 2016, women also suffered multiple setbacks, most notably the defeat of Hillary Clinton, the first female presidential nominee from a major party. Currently:

- Women hold only 24.9 percent of seats in state legislatures.[50]

- They are only 10 percent of governors[51] and only 20 percent of the mayors of the 100 largest American cities.[52]

- Women of color represent only 7.1 percent of the total members of Congress.[53]

- Women of color make up 2 percent of governors and 5.9 percent of state legislators.[54]

And yet, the 2016 election cycle may have ushered in a new wave of women running for office. As of early 2017, EMILY's List—an organization that recruits and trains pro-choice Democratic women—reported that they had heard from more than 11,000 women across all 50 states who are interested in running for office. During the 2016 cycle, this number was about 900.[55]

In sum

Women have outnumbered men on college campuses since 1988.[56] They have earned at least one-third of law degrees since 1980[57] and accounted for fully one-third of medical school students by 1990.[58] Yet they have not moved up to positions of prominence and power in America at anywhere near the rate that should have followed.

In a broad range of fields, their presence in top leadership positions—as equity law partners, medical school deans, and corporate executive officers—remains stuck at a mere 10 percent to 20 percent. As recently as 2012, their "share of voice"—the average proportion of their representation on op-ed pages and corporate boards; as TV pundits, Wikipedia contributors, Hollywood writers, producers, and directors; and as members of Congress—was just 18 percent.[59]

In fact, it has been estimated that, at the current rate of change, it will take until 2085 for women to reach parity with men in key leadership roles in the United States.[60]

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Endnotes

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