

**The New Leadership Landscape:
What Girls Say about Election 2008**

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Background and Objectives

Girl Scouts of the USA launched its new Girl Scout Leadership Development Experience during an historic presidential election involving two female candidates and culminating in the election of the first African American president. The campaign generated an unprecedented level of interest and engagement among young Americans, which observers believe heralds a new era of civic participation and activism among youth.

The Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI), building on its comprehensive survey of girls' leadership conceptions and aspirations, "Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership" (2007), decided to explore the impact of this election on girls' leadership aspirations. The GSRI asked Fluent - a New York-based public opinion and market research firm which was involved in the original "Change It Up!" study - to conduct an online survey with youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years immediately following the November 4th elections.

Executive Summary

Election boosts confidence of youth and fosters interest in civic participation

- The 2008 election has had a positive impact on youth in two important regards: 1) engendering interest in political and social issues among young people, and 2) positively affecting the self-perceptions of youth and their perceptions of their future possibilities and self-expression.
- A significant example of the election's positive impact is the desire engendered among young Americans to engage in the political process: nearly one in two (49%) reported an increased interest in politics; 44% reported an increased interest in social and political activism; and 71% said they intend to vote when they are eligible.
- The survey indicates that the election experience has boosted young people's confidence in their ability to achieve their goals and to change things in the country, and has increased their comfort in

speaking up and expressing their opinions. For instance, 59% of girls and 52% boys reported that the election had a positive impact on their confidence in being able to achieve their goals in the future, and 51% of girls and 45% of boys said it positively impacted their confidence in being able to change things in this country. This motivational impact was particularly pronounced among girls, non-Caucasians (African American youth in particular), those from big cities and from Democratic households, and among those who said they would have voted for Barack Obama.

- There was, however, no evidence that the election has stimulated a significantly greater interest among young people in becoming leaders or caused more of them to think of themselves as leaders. The number of girls and boys who think of themselves as leaders showed no significant increase over the numbers reported in the "Change It Up" study. However, four in ten girls said that the election has had a positive impact on their desire to be a leader. This perception is shared by higher percentages of African American youth and the group identified in "Change It Up!" as Leadership Vanguard. (Leadership Vanguard is a category of youth who currently consider themselves leaders and actively want to be leaders in the future.)

Election heightens appreciation of women's abilities and barriers they face

- The election has had mixed impact on young people's perception of gender equality. While the election has illustrated the capabilities and leadership qualities of women, and has excited girls about the leadership opportunities presented to women, it has also underscored the difficulties women face in seizing those opportunities.
- Substantial numbers (46% of girls and 38% of boys) reported that they think more highly of women's ability to lead than they did before the election. Yet substantial numbers also reported a heightened appreciation for the difficulties women face in reaching leadership positions in our country. Forty-three percent of girls in the survey strongly believe that "girls have to work harder than boys in order to gain positions of leadership" - up from 25% in 2007. Thirty-seven percent of girls agreed that it is more difficult for women to become leaders than it is for men - up from

23% in 2007. The percentage of girls agreeing that men and women have an equal chance of getting a leadership position has dropped to 24% from 35% last year. Boys registered similar though less dramatic patterns in their perceptions of women's challenges.

- Engagement with the 2008 election has enhanced views on women's ability to lead and on the appropriateness of women's leadership: More girls strongly disagreed with statements such as "it's unladylike to be a leader" or "on the whole, men make better political leaders than women do" than did in 2007. More girls also said they believe that women are better than men at "managing money," "collaborating with others," and "handling a crisis."
- Most young people claim to have no major biases with regard to women's skills or abilities. A large majority of girls (82%) and boys (72%) agreed that "girls and boys are equally good at being leaders," although girls are more likely than boys to strongly agree with the statement. The majority of young people also believes that neither gender holds an advantage at fulfilling a variety of roles and functions in society.

Election engenders high engagement and enthusiasm among youth

- Young girls and boys were highly engaged by the 2008 presidential campaign. Sixty-one percent of girls and 56% of boys surveyed reported that the election outcome mattered to them "a lot." Engagement was particularly pronounced among African American girls and boys (83% and 75%, respectively) and Hispanic girls (62%). Current Girl Scouts were also more likely than others (70% vs. 61%) to say it mattered a lot to them who won this election.
- The involvement of two female candidates was one clear source of enthusiasm. The Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin campaigns generated a good deal of excitement among young girls. Seventy-five percent of girls said that they were excited about the two female candidates. A slight majority of boys (55%) also reported being excited to see these two women run for high office.
- Majorities of both girls (65%) and boys (59%) also expressed excitement about the election of the first African American president. African American respondents were particularly enthusiastic: 84% of girls and 80% of boys said they were "very excited" about the historic election.

- High interest in the campaign was reflected in girls' and boys' behavior. High percentages of respondents reported that they followed election news, watched the candidates' debates, talked to family and friends about the election, persuaded others to support their candidate, visited candidates' Web sites, and displayed campaign insignia. About one in five girls reported that they went to the polls with a parent.

Widespread support for Barack Obama

- Barack Obama would have won the 13- to 17-year-old vote with a wider margin than he did the national election: 60% of the survey respondents said they would have voted for the Democratic Party nominee and 26% said they would have voted for John McCain, compared to the 53% - 46% split in the national election. Obama's victory would have been based on majorities of both girls' (61%) and boys' (57%) votes.
- Barack Obama would have won every major ethnic group, too. Forty-seven percent of Caucasian girls and boys said they would have voted for the Democratic ticket, and 36% would have voted for the Republican nominee. Among Hispanics, 69% of girls and 57% of boys said they would have voted for Obama. Among Asians, Obama support was even stronger: 70% of girls and 75% of boys. And the overwhelming majority of African American youth (94% of girls and 92% of boys) would have voted for Obama.
- The results of a hypothetical youth vote are more or less in line with the actual election results. This is probably due to the fact that young respondents were closely aligned in their reported presidential choices with their parents' political identification: 86% of children from Democratic households said they would have voted for Barack Obama, 70% of those from Republican households would have voted for McCain, and 57% of those from Independent households would have gone for Obama.

High expectations for the Barack Obama presidency

- Survey respondents have high expectations for the Barack Obama administration, with two-thirds predicting he will bring positive change to the country. Non-Caucasians, and especially African Americans, were the most optimistic in their predictions of positive

change in the country. Ninety-two percent of African Americans, 72% of Hispanics, and 71% of Asians expect Obama to bring positive change, compared with 51% of Caucasians. Not surprisingly, respondents from Republican households and those who said they would have voted for John McCain were more likely to anticipate negative change or no change at all.

- Young respondents were also closely aligned with the general public with regard to policy priorities. They said that *the economy* should be the newly elected president's first priority, but with many other issues also competing for high importance: *the war in Iraq, education, job creation, health care, uniting the country, college tuition, taxes, and the environment.*

Fairness of the political process is in the eye of the beholder

- Respondents were more divided on the issue of the fairness of the political campaign, with 44% saying the female candidates were treated just as fairly as the male candidates, 38% disagreeing, and 18% saying they weren't sure. Respondents from Republican households and those who leaned toward John McCain were more likely to perceive treatment of the female candidates as unfair than were Barack Obama supporters or African American youth.
- Curiously, gender was not perceived to be uniform in its implications for the candidates. More respondents saw gender as a barrier for Sarah Palin than did for Hillary Clinton. Thirty-eight percent of girls said that gender didn't matter in how Clinton was treated whereas slightly fewer, 31%, said gender did not matter for Palin. Twenty-four percent said that gender hurt Clinton; but 34% said it hurt Palin.
- Similarly, the impact of race was not clear-cut for young people: while one in three believe that Obama was held to a higher standard because of his race, 48% believe that ultimately race actually helped him in the elections.

Merit trumps race and gender in young people's choice of candidates

- When asked about factors that influenced their own decisions of who to support as a candidate, young people asserted that race and gender are less relevant than leadership style and position on issues. Over 40 percent claimed that race and gender do not matter

at all to them in deciding who to support. Notably, this attitude did not vary significantly by either gender or ethnicity.

- Similarly, the majority of respondents (55%) said that gender wouldn't sway their vote in support of a female candidate. While girls are significantly more likely than boys to say they would support a female candidate (36% vs. 15%), the majority (50%) claimed that gender wouldn't be the deciding factor.

Anticipation of advancement of women and ethnic minorities

- The majority of girls and boys believes that women and ethnic minorities will gain more high level government positions as a result of the 2008 election. Most also feel confident a woman will be elected to the United States presidency in their lifetimes. Seventy-one percent of girls believe it is likely that a woman will be elected as president in the United States within the next 10 years; 22% believe it will "definitely" happen.
- Interestingly, while they expect this to happen, many do not feel it is essential. Fifty-eight percent of girls and 77% of boys said that it does not bother them that no woman has ever been elected President of the United States. Fifty-four percent of girls and 72% of boys also said they wouldn't be disappointed if no female candidates ran for office in the next presidential election.

Methodology

The survey consisted of online interviews conducted with a sample of 3,284 respondents between the ages of 13 and 17. The sample design included an oversampling of African American, Hispanic, and Asian youths. The data are weighted to produce a final sample representative of the general population of young people in the United States.

Surveys were conducted from November 11 through December 2, 2008.

The total sample of 3,284 respondents included 2,309 girls and 975 boys.

Respondents for this survey were selected randomly by recruiting parents from an online panel of adults who had opted to participate in online surveys and polls. The random sample of parents who had children in the qualifying age and gender categories were first polled about their basic demographic information (e.g., race, region, education, household income, religion, political affiliations, etc.),

and then asked for permission to conduct interviews with their children.

In the sample, the following groups are represented: 24% of parents who identified themselves as Republican, 45% as Democrat, 18% as Independent, and 4% as other. Eight percent preferred not to answer. In addition, 28% of parents identified their political views as conservative, 37% as moderate, and 20% as liberal. Two percent said other, and 13% preferred not to answer.

The sample includes current Girl Scouts (6%), girls who have been a Girl Scout in the past (35%), and girls who have never been a Girl Scout (59%).