

History Matters: A Woman for President

As a result of President Joe Biden's decision to exit the 2024 election, America is faced with the prospect of electing its first woman president. Vice President Kamala Harris is only the second woman to run for the office of President in our nation's history.

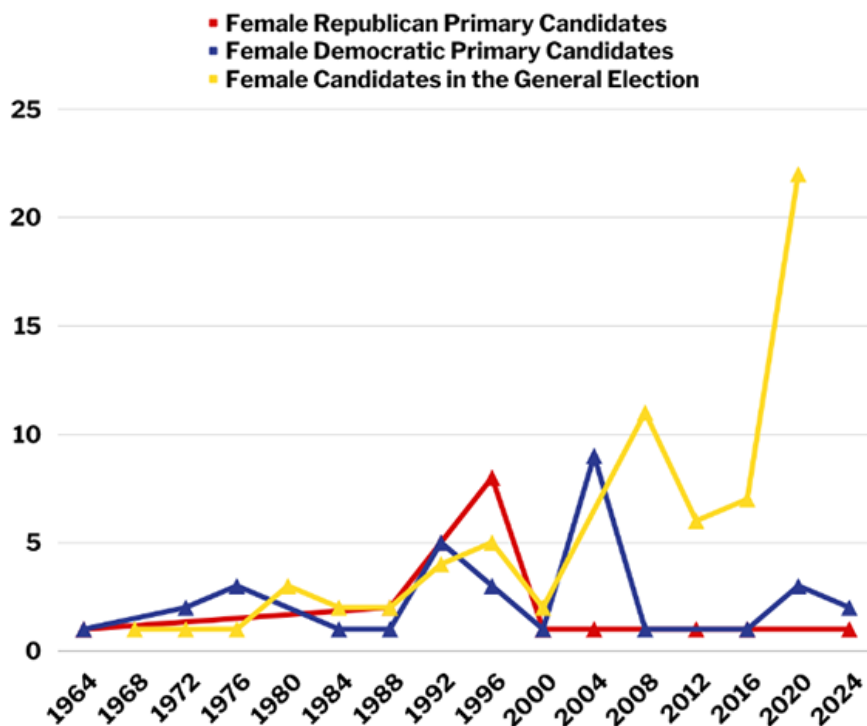
Americans enjoy thinking of themselves as revolutionary, and yet the reluctance the United States has historically shown in electing women to the highest offices is noticeably out of step with the rest of the democratic world. England elected Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979, and Germany elected Angela Merkel as Chancellor in 2005, just to name a few. Other nations that have elected notable women leaders include India, Australia, New Zealand, and Finland. More recently, in June 2024, Mexico elected Claudia Sheinbaum as its first female president.

Why has the US lagged on this point? Several possible explanations include:

- Political networks, which have historically been dominated by men, may have been resistant to female leadership. This potential resistance could have resulted in women receiving less support and encouragement from their parties.
- Extreme religious beliefs might have contributed to keeping women out of leadership roles in religious organizations, which may have in turn hindered their ability to seek more secular forms of power.
- Conservative politics, particularly in its reinforcement of traditional gender roles that typically confine women to the private sphere, might have played a role in limiting women's access to positions of power in public and professional domains.

- Media sources might focus more sustained attention on the details of women’s gender and personal lives than they do on men’s. For example: “When Vice President Kamala Harris was announced as Joe Biden’s running mate in 2020, 61% of the media mentioned her gender and race, while just 5% of coverage mentioned Tim Kaine or Mike Pence’s gender and race in 2016. Research has shown that reporters emphasize women’s traditional roles and focus more on their appearance.” (Holzman, Whaley)
- Some Americans might believe women are less likely to align with their views on critical issues, such as abortion and gun control.

FEMALE CANDIDATES IN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY & GENERAL ELECTIONS 1964-2023



Over the last several decades, women have made gains in leadership overall, but continue to trail behind men. For example, in 2024, women represent 26% of the seats in Congress, while they are 51% of the population. This is despite the fact that, according to the Center for American Women and Politics, not only are more women than men registered to vote, but more women report voting.

70% of women in the country are registered to vote and yet a majority report feeling that their representatives do not advocate for them. By having a woman at the top of the ticket, the 2024 election may offer women the opportunity to achieve long-awaited political and cultural advances.

Brodie, Molly, Hamel, Liz. Kearney, Liz, Kirzinger, Ashley. “[KFF Survey of Women Voters: Key Takeaways](#).” *KFF*, June 2024.

Holzman, Kylie. Whaley, Carah. “[Why Haven’t We Had A Woman President?](#)” *The Center for Politics*, September 2024, Updated 2024.

Goddard, Isabel., Horowitz, Juliana Menasche. “[Women and Political Leadership Ahead of the 2024 Election](#).” *Pew Research Center*, September 2023.

<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/levels-office/congress/women-us-congress-2024>